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Ginger Nolan

## Introduction

"All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (à l'envers), of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings."

-Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

"We all, in one way or another, dimly feel that not only punctual and local forms of cultural resistance and guerilla warfare but also even overtly political interventions like those of The Clash are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it."

-Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

This issue of *Thresholds* takes as its starting point the fundamental ambiguity of what it means to invert something. Although at its most literal level, to invert is "to turn inside-out or upside-down," or "to reverse the position, order, or condition of,"<sup>1</sup> one often encounters much hazier interpretations, whereby anything which deviates from the norm is considered to constitute an "inversion" of that norm. This implied equality between the concepts of *inversion*, *transgression*, and *disruption* led me to inquire: What is the relationship between a literal inversion and its associated meanings? And why and has this term "inversion" become ubiquitous to the point of lending itself to such broad—and often vague—interpretations?

One obvious answer to this might be that the notion of inversion is closely imbricated with 20th-century avant-gardeist attitudes which mandate that any aesthetic or intellectual development must in some way react against—or invert—that which preceded it. Thus, to be "subversive," to mis-appropriate iconographic language, to mis-use standard techniques or media, or to

offer transgressive critiques of the norm are all more or less routine procedures. In fact, if one were to agree with Jameson, then any attempts at subversion would not really seem so subversive, after all, as such attempts are often co-opted by the very power structures which they challenge. And yet this begs further consideration: Firstly what does it really mean to 'invert' something, and what, if anything, are such inversions meant to achieve?

To follow Bakhtin's conception of the carnival, the inverse of a thing is not its opposite so much as it is the thing itself turned on its head, transformed so as to comically reveal its own undoing. What could constitute such an inversion, however—what it could actually mean to reverse something in such a way that its original significance is still detectable but in an altered form—presents a conundrum that might be grasped intuitively but somehow rebuffs clear definition. Is an inversion a mirror-image, an antithesis, or simply a re-working? In works ranging from Duchamp's "Fountain" to Ken Jacob's films, or to Natalie Jermijenko's *Tree Logic* (cover image), a familiar object or medium is literally presented upside down. In such cases, inversions may serve to disorient and dislocate; they may allude to processes of perception and representation; or they may simply question standard assumptions and expectations.

Within this issue, artists, architects, and scholars explore ways in which inversion operates: Mark Jarzombek posits inversion as paradox in "Architecture against Architecture;" Kelly Dobson's work explores role-reversals whereby typical relations between humans and machines are interchanged; Carl Solander's "Placing Virtuality," examines inversion as disruption, as does Tim Campos' and Antonio Muntadas' piece on "On Translation: Die Stadt." A more literal look at inversion is offered by Tamar Tembeck who discusses Mona Hatoum's installation, *Corps étranger*, which uses endoscopy to allow the viewer to tour the body of the artist inside-out; Ross Adam's "Reversals of Place" as well as Alona Nitzan-Shifan's, Ganit Mayslits', and Udi Kassif's collaborative "Neuland" project propose ironic reversals of existing urban-architectural conditions. Lastly,

**Figure 1\_** (facing page) "The artist, half man and half fool's-cap" from Grandville's *Un Autre Monde*

in an effort to delve further into this interrogation, I spoke with Krzysztof Wodiczko, an artist and former teacher of mine who had first introduced me to Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque subversion. In our conversation, he affirmed the tradition of avant-garde disruptive-ness as a practice that still bears relevancy and usefulness for us today

While this issue of *Thresholds* by no means answers all the questions I've posed, the writing and projects included here do, I believe, begin to scratch away at the relationship between the literal inversion of a thing and the symbolic implications of such an inversion. If I would offer anything in conclusion, it would simply be this conjecture: that perhaps the real trick of inversion is that it unmasks the fundamental ambiguity of right-side-up versus upside-down, showing that these relationships can often be reciprocal and interchangeable and are often so closely linked that we may not even be able to distinguish the one from the other.

#### **Notes:**

- 1 From Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary

## Quotient City: A Topological Exploration of Space<sup>1</sup>



The concept of inversion occurs with great frequency in mathematics.<sup>2</sup> In abstract algebra, with a given group  $(G, *)$ , the inverse of an element  $a$  in  $G$  is the element  $a^{-1}$  such that  $a * a^{-1} = e$ , where  $e$  is the identity of  $G$ . For instance, in the nonzero complex numbers  $(\mathbb{C} - \{0\}, *)$  under multiplicative binary operation, the inverse of 100 is  $1/100$  since  $100 * 1/100 = 1$ , the identity element for  $*$  on  $\mathbb{C} - \{0\}$ ; and the inverse of the imaginary number  $i$  is  $-i$  since  $i * (-i) = -i^2 = -(-1) = 1$ . Similarly in matrix algebra,  $I_2 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$  acts much as the number 1 does for multiplication,

and a square matrix  $A \in M_{2 \times 2}(\mathbb{R})$  is said to be invertible if  $A^{-1}$  exists such that  $A A^{-1} = A^{-1} A = I_2$ . For example,

$$\begin{bmatrix} 2 & 9 \\ 1 & 4 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} -4 & 9 \\ 1 & -2 \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} -4 & 9 \\ 1 & -2 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} 2 & 9 \\ 1 & 4 \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

proves that  $\begin{bmatrix} 2 & 9 \\ 1 & 4 \end{bmatrix}$  is invertible.

In geometry the notion of inversion is further manifested with visually conceivable illustrations. The transformation defined by

$$f(p) = \frac{p - p_0}{|p - p_0|} + p_0, \quad p \in \mathbb{R}^n - \{p_0\}$$

shows an inversion with respect to the unit sphere centered at  $p_0 \in \mathbb{R}^n$ . Geometrically,  $f$  takes  $p \in \mathbb{R}^n - \{p_0\}$  into a point  $f(p)$ , which is on the line through  $(p)$  and  $p_0$  at a distance  $|f(p) - p_0| = 1 / |p - p_0|$  from  $p_0$ . Therefore  $f$  keeps fixed the sphere of radius 1 around  $p_0$  and permutes the interior region with the exterior of such a sphere. In particular,  $f^2 = \text{identity}$ ; that is,  $f^{-1} = f$ .<sup>4</sup>

Inversion, as the above algebraic and geometrical examples demonstrate, involves a reciprocal relation between two ele-

ments, each an opposition of the other in reference to an identity element and each bears a distorted resemblance of the other: numerator vs. denominator (100 and  $1/100$ ), positive versus negative ( $i$  and  $-i$ ), and deranged entries with or without changed signs in the matrices.

To assimilate this mathematical notion of inversion, the following tells a story of a city that embodies both an origin and its inverse, with the reader—the reader's mind—as the identity element. The city is Quotient City and the motivation of the city is Quotient Topology. It comes from geometry—geometry as constructed surfaces using cut-and-paste technologies: a disk with its boundary sewed to a point creates a sphere (topologically speaking); a rectangle having its opposite edges joined with a half-twist makes a Möbius band (figure 1), et cetera.

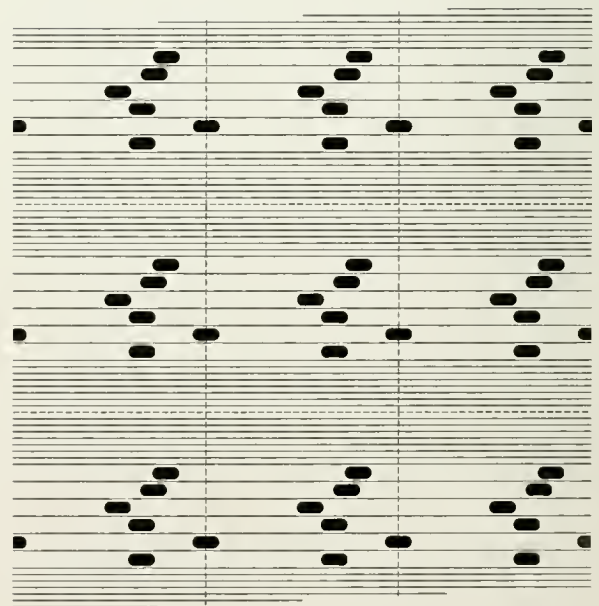
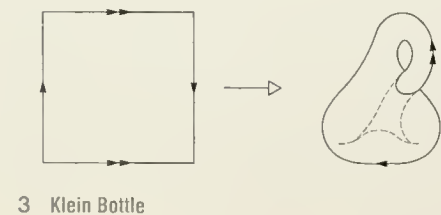
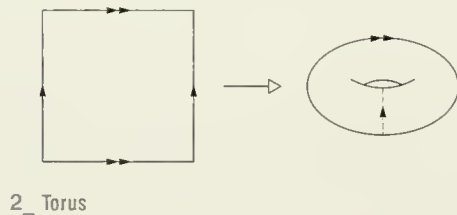
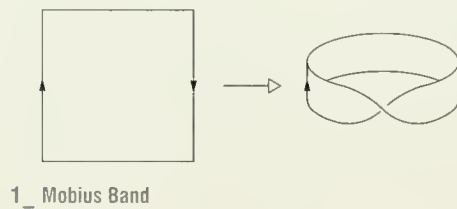
### Quotient City

At a glance, in God's view, the city resembles a chessboard marked with squares in various sizes. The surfaces of the city seem continuous, where one square ends the next starts, and evidences of visual continuity are spotted here and there: an entomologist ogle a tarantula across a border; a meddlesome neighbor gesticulates at a couple fighting next door. However, acoustic continuity is doubtful—there are cats sleeping soundly in one quad, paying no attention to the mad bulldog barking nearby at another. Neither is the spatial continuity apparent. No inhabitants are seen moving about from square to square crossing the boundaries, and no objects are found stretching across the edges. Indeed, besides the siting contiguity and visual connectivity, the squares appear autonomous and self-contained, each an entity independent of the others.

Situated at the heart of the city is a giant square, where functions and activities—governance, merchandise, theater, religious congregations, etc—concentrate, and sentiments of engaging and belonging brew. From here the city imbricates outwardly. As such, the central square simulates an origin and gives orientation. Contrary to the hybrid city center, there in each square resides but one singular program: pig farm, butterfly garden, Spanish moss yard, pencil factory. Adjoining the sunbathing square festooned with colorful bikinis and shorts is a horserace square streaked with bright red bleachers on two ends and race-tracks sandwiched in between. One reposeful, the other clamorous. On the tracks the horses are running full speed towards the sunbathing field. Though fast approaching the boundary, the horses show no sign of decelerating, while the bodies basking on the grass show no agitation; presently the horses will stamp on the sunbathers. However, just as the restless are about to collide with the relaxed, a disruption occurs: The instant the horses reach the border, they disappear into it but only reappear from the opposite side of the square where the starting line is. In this way the cyclic movement recurs and repeats until the distance of the race is finished

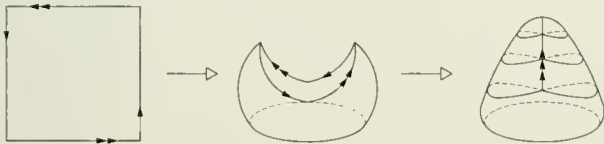
The spatial inversion in truth is the result of a quotient mapping. Simply stated, the horserace square has its opposite edges pasted together. With the first pair of edges glued together, the square transforms to a cylinder and then with the second pair, the circular ends of the cylinder, it becomes a torus—or a donut (figure 2). Therefore, while the horserace square is visually a flat rectangle, spatially it is a donut, and the tracks are circular paths wrapping around the donut in the same direction. Alternatively, the space can be visualized in a “flat” point of view as infinite identical copies of the horserace square placed edge to edge (figure 4), and the horse race be followed by focusing on any one horizontal strip left to right, just as one would reading a comic strip. But to make sense of the race, all other cells that simultaneously show the same image must be ignored.

In this city, as with the horserace field, every square undergoes a quotient operation. But not all squares are donuts in disguise. There are also Klein bottles and real projective planes (RPP). The Klein bottle is derived from taping a square's opposite edges and giving one pair a half-twist (figure 3). In virtue of this operation, the real estate value of a Klein bottle doubles that of a donut,

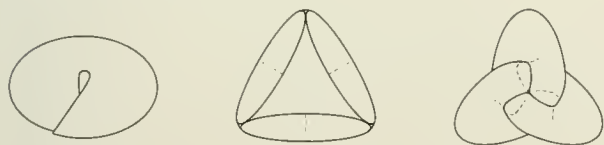


as the square's front and back are joined through the half-twist mapping and each surface becomes a mere half of the whole. Therefore, a skyscraper at a Klein bottle is a twin structure with one tower shooting upwards and a reflected mirror image downwards. Likewise, coconut trees grow up and upside down; sheep flock above and beneath; some bats hang from a cave's ceiling and some stand on their feet on the ground

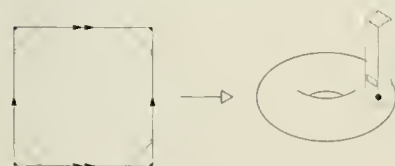
Similarly, attaching a square's opposite edges and giving both pairs a half-twist generates a real projective plane (figure 5). Here in Quotient City the real projective plane differentiates itself from other squares not just through form but also through its formal indeterminacy. A RPP square never assumes one stable form but morphs perpetually among its topological equivalencies: the crosscap, the Roman surface, and the boy's surface (figure 6). As a matter of fact, all objects in a RPP are dynamic—they distort and contort, contract and expand, transmutation is the only constant. Within, the olfactory, the palatal, the tactile, and other senses have no use; nothing is discernable but the distinguished topological forms. Thus at Café Quotidian, a customer orders a cup of coffee and a bagel, the waitress serves him two bagels. Another receives two coffees.



5\_ Real projective plane



6\_ Crosscap, Roman surface, and boy's surface (left to right)



7\_ Prison square

## Transit and Decomposition Toponomy

And so, to traverse a neighboring square across the boundary is impossible; the borderlines are merely interstices demarcating the spatial splits between adjacent autonomous planes. Instead the inhabitants of Quotient City commute via the field of velocity, a non-space of motion and force and nexuses. The city is so constructed that *the corners*—or the corner in the cases of torus and Klein bottle since their corners are but one point—of every square link(s) to a nexus in the field of velocity. When the inhabitants feel the need to leave a square, they approach a corner and vanish into its linking nexus (where a speed is obtained), motion to another and resurface at a destination corner.

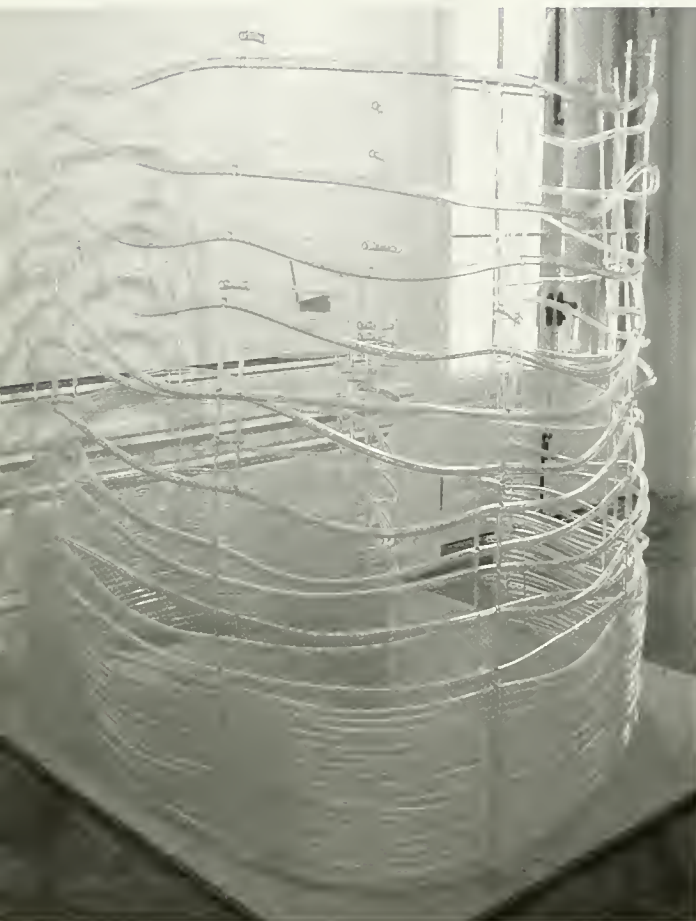
The influence of the transit infrastructure on the city's architectural design and urban planning is ineluctable. The city government issues building codes that prescribe detailed regulations concerning threshold conditions at corners. For instances, 1007.5.1 states that for the purpose of egress, obstructions within one meter of any corners are prohibited. 603.3.2 specifies construction method for type N buildings—prison and reformatory: A prison or a reformatory should consist of four separate austere walls at the corners, one with a locked door and another a small opening to pass food and water. The blockage to corners is sufficient to jail a criminal. No further constructions required (figure 7).

At an urban scale the transport system determines the city's toponomy, its blueprint grounded on a topological concept that mathematicians call "decomposition space." The decomposition is made possible because the time required to motion from any nexus to the 0-nexus that connects the central square is distinct, in fraction of a second's time. If the time required is, say,  $\frac{3}{8}$  of a second, then the nexus is named 3-8-nexus and the squares linked to it constitute the 3-8-second district. Thus quotient by time the city is partitioned into zones. Further in a zone a tertiary number is assigned to every square within as an address. E.G., 7-4-7 stands for the seventh square in 7-4-second district

## Private House Law

The houses are water curves built by dwellers themselves; one habitation per square abiding the canon of singular-program. Actually not "house" but "ring-stacking toy" is what the private habitation termed—appropriated from its construction method. On the ground of every living-square are small pits (quotient points) blocked with stoppers when not in use. To build, a set of quotient points is selected to receive the erect rods which in turn receive the water rings—the points dictate form, the rod support as the rings skin the structure. To raze, simply reverse the building process. That is the standard ring-stacking toy construction (figure 8)





8\_ 6'x6'x6' ring-stacking toy installation at Urban Center Gallery in New York City

The populace of the city splits in two: the Extroverts and the Introverts. The Extroverts enjoy living on the edges. Their houses or parts of the houses are built along the periphery. Often, they are seen busy coming and going, from and into the edges, slicing their life apart and then piecing it back together. The Extroverts argue that a life devoid of topological transformation betrays the city's identity. Only if the distinctiveness of quotient spatiality is acknowledged will the city retain its meaning of existence. Therefore, the Extroverts see the exploration of spatial possibilities as their duty, and take pleasure in building Mobius houses, Dissected houses, and other forms that celebrate quotient spaces.

In contrast, the Introverts delight in simulated box-like living. Their houses are built away from the periphery. So are their living. Thick bushes or trees planted around the boundary, miniscule moats built along the sides, and the quotient edges are disremembered. The Introverts prefer Euclidean to Topology, think highly of the classical Geometry and appreciate the simplicity of rudimentary geometric forms, such as cubes, pyramid, and globes. They say, why glorify the edgy peculiarity, why act differently

Thus the Extroverts work around while the Introverts shy away from the borders. Nonetheless, both amuse in playing with the ring-stacking toys. When one acquires a novel idea or grows weary of a design, the structure is disassembled and reassembled anew with new thought, new plan, and new form. Therefore the city is never still. Everyday a new composition is produced because of some restless, insatiate inhabitants.

At a second glance, in God's view, the city no longer looks like a chessboard marked with squares, but an aggregation of discrete geometric objects, a collection of constructed surfaces: torus, Klein bottle, boy's surface, Roman surface, and crosscap; big or small, all self-closed and erased of the vestiges of edges.

#### Notes:

1. For definitions of topology and topological space, refer to Hsieh's "Urban Sleeper" in *Thresholds* 27 (2003): 76
2. A group is an ordered pair  $(G, +)$  where  $G$  is a set and  $+$  is a binary operation on  $G$  satisfying the following axioms:
  - 1  $(a + b) + c = a + (b + c)$ , for all  $a, b, c \in G$
  2. There exists an element  $e$  in  $G$  such that  $a + e = e + a = a$ , for all  $a \in G$  ( $e$  is called an identity of  $G$ ).
  - 3 For each  $a \in G$  there is an element  $a^{-1}$  of  $G$  such that  $a + a^{-1} = a^{-1} + a = e$  ( $a^{-1}$  is called an inverse of  $a$ )

(Dummit and Foote, *Abstract Algebra*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1999, 17-18)

3  $R$  denotes the real numbers and  $R^n$  denotes  $R \times R \times \dots \times R$ , the Cartesian product of  $n$  sets of  $R$ .

4 Manfredo Perdigao do Carmo . translated by Francis Flaherty, *Riemannian Geometry*, (Boston: Birkhauser, 1992), 169.

5. The form of a bagel is topologically equivalent to that of a coffee cup.

Carl Solander

## Placing Virtuality: Flash Mobs, Electronic Disturbance, and the War of the Worlds

One evening in the middle of June, 2003, around two hundred people arrived at Macy's department store in New York City looking for a "love rug." The mob swarmed around a salesman, explaining that they all lived together in a warehouse, and proceeded to discuss the merits of various rugs. Suddenly, after precisely ten minutes, the crowd dispersed.<sup>1</sup> Thus was born the "flash mob," part performance art, part prank, all play. The people who participated did not all know each other, but came together as a result of a network forged by a chain of forwarded email. Arriving at various bars in the area that evening where they expected to receive instructions, they had no idea what they would be doing that night or where. They merely gathered together expecting to do something fun and strange. At the bars, mob organizers handed out cards with loose instructions for the event, all precisely timed, and then the participants moved on to their place of assembly. This is the basic structure of the flash mob: precisely planned in its intention but spontaneous in its execution, scheduled yet always a surprise to onlookers, playfully disruptive and ephemeral. The flash mob is a new type of public event which is enabled largely by the organizational capacity of the internet.

This essay seeks to explore the role of virtual space in giving rise to events that shape physical space. Whereas virtual space is often perceived as a symbolic appendage to physical space, I propose to examine cases in which virtual space actually unfolds within physical space, instigates occurrences within it, and thereby alters the reception of a particular place. In fact, such cases would seem to satisfy the "true" meaning of virtuality—that is, not something that is merely a symbolic representation of the actual world, but something which exists in parallel to actuality as pure potential. The flash mob, a phenomenon characterized by the momentary disruption of the physical environment by a virtual community, is an instance in which the potential of virtuality becomes realized. According to wordspy.com, flash mob is defined as: "A large group of people who gather in a usually predetermined location, perform some brief action, and then quickly disperse." It is also sometimes called "inexplicable mob." The advent of the flash mob has its precursors in various manipulations of media that

somehow erupt into physical space. What curiously unites such examples is that in the re-inscription of boundaries delimiting the virtual and the physical, a fundamental subversion of authority seems to occur.

I trace the history of the flash mob back to October 30th, 1938. What occurred on that day was quite a different phenomenon from the flash mob, yet it certainly shares many characteristics in terms of the relationship between media and event. On that night Orson Welles presented his infamous broadcast of H.G. Wells' "War of the Worlds." In an hour-long performance that began at 8:00 PM:

"Welles would so brilliantly manipulate the properties and conventions of broadcasting that over a million listeners would believe that the United States was actually under attack from marauding armies of Martians. By exploiting the public's deference to voices of authority, and by playing on their endemic fears of war and disaster, their faith in the familiar, and their views of science, Welles gave the country the greatest Halloween scare it had ever experienced. By pulling off the most monumental hoax in broadcast history, Welles provided Americans with the most potent demonstration yet of the enormous power radio wielded in their lives."<sup>2</sup>

In a typical broadcast, the radio takes on the role of mediator, and the audience is aware of its separation from the action being depicted. What makes Welles' broadcast significant is that he convinced a large portion of his audience that the events of the broadcast were real: that they were not remote at all, but coextensive with the actual spaces reached by the broadcast. By using the normative techniques of the radio broadcast subversively, Welles was able to transcend the apparent limitations of the medium, projecting a reality rather than merely describing one. The events he described merged with real events, the space indicated in the narrative became real space, and the scripted timeframe replaced real time. For many of the one million listeners who entered into this fictional space, the Martian invasion became an event in which they participated.



How did Welles and scriptwriter Howard Koch achieve this tremendous effect? Much has been made of the fact that many listeners probably tuned in late and did not hear the disclaimer issued at the beginning of the broadcast, yet there were three more disclaimers during the broadcast. In *Emergency Broadcasting and 1930's American Radio*, Edward D. Miller cites a number of techniques that give a sense of credibility to the broadcast. First, the use of familiar place names relates the fictional events directly to the experiential world of the audience. Second, the use of multiple cuts between simulated locations gives the broadcast an authoritative knowledge of happenings in multiple places. Third, simulated eyewitness accounts and interviews fragment a continuous, dramatic narration into multiple viewpoints and reinforce a sense of reality. Fourth, the simulation of accidents and unplanned responses, particularly the employment of dead air for dramatic effect (often to express disbelief or to represent the death of the speaker), provides a sense of spontaneity that mimics that of a real disaster broadcast. The audience had become accustomed to accepting the form of the broadcast as a validation of its content, so much so that people chose to believe the voice emanating from the radio over the (lack of) evidence they could witness in their own towns.

Orson Welles, in a BBC interview years later, claimed that he wanted to challenge the authority of truth that the radio held over the public: "Radio in those days, before the tube and the transistor, wasn't just a noise in somebody's pocket—it was a voice of authority. Too much so. At least I thought so. It was time for someone to take the starch... out of some of that authority: hence my broadcast."<sup>3</sup> Media, through those internal devices that establish its position within the discernible, experiential realm, has the ability to alter one's perception of occurrences that take place outside of media, in real space. In the case of "War of the Worlds," a fictional representation gave birth to real events. The events which resulted from the "War of the Worlds" broadcast do not constitute a singular event in the same sense as a local festival; however, they share some carnivalesque qualities of the festival as described by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*. Specifically, Bakhtin's notion of inversion, of everyday settings being transformed by the carnival, of normal social relations being reversed, was an important characteristic of the public response to Welles' broadcast. This notion is manifest within the text of the War of the Worlds novel. One of the characters of the novel, Pierson, is left at the end of the story surveying a familiar landscape which appears strange to him, transformed by his witnessing of the Martian invasion. "The event of the invasion has brought out the estrangement inherent in everyday objects, rendering them as if they have been replaced."<sup>4</sup> This strangeness of the everyday, a quality of the novel, and of the carnival, seems to be a major psychological factor in the public panic that resulted from the radio broadcast. Many people claimed to have actually seen the aliens or their destructive heat rays when most

likely what they saw were everyday occurrences which had been perceptually transformed by their own fear—by the carnivalesque atmosphere initiated by the broadcast. "In Boston, people gathered on rooftops to marvel at the colorful patterns in the night sky produced by the alleged 'burning of New York'—actually the hue of distant neon signs."<sup>5</sup> The broadcast caused the uncanny elements of the everyday to surface in peoples' minds; proving that, although the medieval carnival is a long-forgotten ritual, the carnivalesque still lurks just beneath the surface of everyday society<sup>6</sup>. As I will examine later, this notion of strangeness is also a characteristic of the flash mob.

A final important aspect of the public reaction to "War of the Worlds" is the distortion of time projected by Welles which people accepted in their state of panic. Again, this notion can be grounded in Bakhtin's writings on the Medieval festival. Festivals have their own temporal frameworks that distinguish the occasion of the festival from everyday time. During a festival, normal schedules are suspended and the cyclical nature of time, time related to ritual, takes precedence over its linear qualities. The superimposition of festival temporality onto the spaces which usually support fixed work schedules is an important aspect of the transformative nature of the festival. In his presentation of "War of the Worlds," Orson Welles names many real places, and the fictional narrators travel from one place to the other in order to broadcast reports of the Martian invasion. The travel time allotted for many of these journeys is far less than would actually be possible: For instance, one correspondent apparently travels eleven miles in ninety seconds. While at the beginning of the broadcast Welles maintains a relatively believable timeframe, by the end the pace of the action has accelerated beyond the realm of possibility.

"...only by 'telescoping the reality of dramatic time' could listeners logically accept that within the span of three quarters of an hour, 'large bodies of troops were mobilized, cabinet meetings were held, and savage battles were fought on land, air, and sea.' The 'sheer onrush of events in a rapid-fire manner' severely hindered the listener's ability to apply logical standards 'to the incredible things he was hearing.'"<sup>7</sup>

The broadcast initiates a sort of festival temporality in which normal space-time relations are disregarded and the power of logic is subordinated to the dramatic force of the narration, its presumed authority, and the collective credulity of the mob. The flash mob also contains something of this festival time, where a large number of people are pulled out of their daily schedule and assembled in one location in order to perform a ludicrously brief coordinated action.

The internet shares some commonalities with radio in terms of its relationship to the physical world: its effects are extra-spatial while at the same time they are insistent to human perception, perhaps more so than many physical cues. Ricardo

Dominguez, one of the cofounders of an art-activist group called Electronic Disturbance Theater, is a pioneer in using the internet to simulate, or even supplant, protest actions. After first using the internet effectively as a tool for coordination and dissemination of information to other activists, Dominguez decided that the World Wide Web itself could become a site for protest. His first action was in solidarity with the Zapatista movement of Southern Mexico. Along with a small group of collaborators, Dominguez created a program called FloodNet:

"The Zapatista FloodNet system would ask, 'Is there justice on this system?' And the system responds, 'Justice is not found on this server.' 'Is there democracy on this server?' 'Democracy is not found on this server.' ... And this is called a 404, a traditional function of the Internet that lets you know that what you are looking for doesn't exist on that server. And so by doing this small gesture, we create a disturbance because it takes up CPU. It takes up space. In the same way that bodies would take up space, say in real life, these kinds of questions, this kind of reloading takes up space."<sup>8</sup>

The FloodNet system is not a self-propagating virus; its effectiveness depends completely on the number of users accessing a web site. It is not the program itself that "crashes" the website, but the number of requests made to that website by individual users. Thus the program is designed to simulate the effect of bodies occupying a space of protest, extending the spatial metaphor of the internet such that it begins to merge in practice with actions in physical space. The program is an intervention which clarifies the issue of the protest and allows the users to more clearly understand the collective nature of their isolated actions. During the first major action which employed FloodNet in early 1998, approximately 14,800 people from across the world visited Mexican President Zedillo's website within a prescribed timeframe.<sup>9</sup>

While the internet is obviously a non-spatial phenomenon, seemingly the power of the spatial metaphor is so strong, and the interactive properties of the internet so evident, that it has come to take on many of the same social properties as physical space. Although the people who took part in Dominguez's internet sit-in were not directly aware of each others' presence, the frequent failures of Zedillo's server to return their requests provided an indirect indication of the results of their collective actions. Furthermore, the time and "address" of the action had been established beforehand, so those participating already had an awareness of their collectivity. The collective reality that these cyber-protesters projected is not dissimilar from that which arose out of the "War of the Worlds" broadcast. A certain suspension of reality is necessary in order to accept the unified nature of thousands of separate individuals scattered across the globe pushing buttons in protest. A sense of inversion is also inherent in the device of the FloodNet, which employs a standard, pragmatic tool in a dysfunctional way that

makes the server seem to "speak," to admit its own guilt, or rather the guilt of the institution that sponsors it. This early use of the internet as a site of protest can be seen as prefiguring the realization of an even more potent possibility: the use of virtual actions to bolster the effectiveness of physical actions.

One landmark incident which marks the efflorescence of hybrid physical-virtual social networks is the massive anti-WTO protest in Seattle in 1999 "And you started seeing in 1999 the networks, not only coagulating, but spilling out into the streets."<sup>10</sup> Dominguez hails the ability of virtual networks to extend the impact of physical events and to make it possible for people who cannot attend the physical event to participate remotely in an act of protest. Through the combination of virtual and physical protest, "...what is considered a small local action becomes a larger global action."<sup>11</sup> While marching in the street and querying a website are not the same, the temporal co-ordination of the two, aimed at the same source (an institution and the website supported by that institution) generates a degree of solidarity that projects a unified social space onto a fragmented geographical space. Like the reality projected by Orson Welles and accepted and acted upon by his listeners, the unity of this event is not actual but imagined, yet perhaps we can accept that it is imagined into reality through the actions of the participants.

Howard Reingold finds further significance in the 1999 "Battle of Seattle." The use of wireless communication devices allowed for an unprecedented amount of coordination and instant responsiveness among the many disparate groups of protesters. The protesters formed "...a kind of dynamic, ad hoc alliance that wouldn't have been possible without a mobile, many-to-many, real-time communication network."<sup>12</sup> Activists were able to post updates instantly to web sites which could be viewed by other activists, allowing the different groups to respond to the situation as it unfolded. The use of cell phones and instant messaging allowed groups to coordinate "swarm tactics," the sudden coming together of a large group of people which prevents authorities from anticipating the location and size of a protest. Digital technologies not only extend the possible field of the protest, as lauded by Dominguez, but also qualitatively change the tactics of the localized protest itself.

It is from this background that the flash mob phenomenon emerged. It seems that the world was ready for such a playful exposition of the potentials of this new technology: within only a couple of months of the first flash mob in New York, flash mobs had appeared in numerous cities on six continents. It is perhaps because of the similarity of the flash mob in its organization and execution to the "swarm tactics" employed by activists that Bill, the organizer of the first flash mobs in New York, claims, "There seems to be something inherently political about an inexplicable mob."<sup>13</sup> Yet most of the early flash mobs, which appeared across the globe during the summer and fall of 2003,

are more playful than political. A few examples. In Rome, Italy a mob of several hundred people appeared at a bookstore requesting non-existent titles; in Cape Town, South Africa around 150 people converged on a convention center and made duck sounds for eight minutes; in Auckland, New Zealand around 200 people arrived at a Burger King and mooed for one minute, and in Sao Paulo, Brazil, around 100 people met at one of the city's busiest intersections, each removing one shoe and beating it on the pavement several times.

Perhaps the first and the last New York mobs organized by Bill (he gives no surname in interviews) point to the negative and positive potentials of the flash mob. The first mob Bill attempted to organize, before his success at Macy's, ended with police, informed by a recipient of the initial email, preventing participants from entering the planned location. Many other potential flash mobs across the world have been barred by the police; one, in a Prague supermarket, ended in the brutal beating of a photographer by security guards. It seems that the inherently political nature of the inexplicable mob is also inherently distressing to authorities. There is something subversive about the flash mob which seems bound to incite the authorities to respond, even when the intentions are obviously playful and harmless, the spontaneous mass gathering is by its nature threatening to the state apparatus. The capacity of digital technology to allow for easy coordination of large groups of people is a benefit both to institutions and individuals; yet, because this power is now much more accessible to individuals than it has been in the past, it also threatens the role of the institution in society. Perhaps this is the root cause for the desire of state authorities to control these personal networks when they make an appearance in physical space.

The final New York mob organized by Bill, which took place in Times Square, was accidentally hijacked by a non-participant. As hundreds of people gathered expecting to take cues from an unknown person who would emerge on the scene, an interlocutor produced a neon sign from a suitcase reading "Café Thou Art" while flashing the peace sign. Some in the mob took this man's action to be a cue, and started chanting "Peace," while others suspected that he was an imposter and followed the instructions they had been given, chanting "Mob." This random occurrence changed the choreographed form that the mob was supposed to take, pointing at unknown possibilities for mobs to form and take cues from happenstance, essentially conjuring mass events out of everyday occurrences. With the flash mob, it seems, the necessity of a focus for an event is eclipsed by the ability to gather a large number of participants. Furthermore, the distinction between participants and audience becomes more blurred the less directed the mob is, and the more responsive it is to the surrounding environment. Reingold speaks of a crowd of people, particularly when interconnected through digital technology, as having a sort of swarm intelligence, an ability to respond to situations in ways

not possible when group actions are directed by an individual.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the potential emerging out of the flash mob is for truly spontaneous, transformative events, events that could arise out of a loose network of participants and then assume a dynamic character as they move through the space of a city.

The condensed temporality of the flash mob relates to the events that followed Orson Welles' broadcast in 1938: a temporality that erupts out of normalcy, which distorts one's perception of everyday schedules. The time of the flash mob is a festival temporality. The absurd brevity of flash mobs points to a sort of abortive festivity, the carnivalesque that lies just beneath the surface (the beach beneath the pavement) gaining expression for an instant, then dissipating. But the temporal significance of the flash mob extends beyond the limits of its occurrence. Perhaps, because of its brevity, witnesses or participants may begin to expect such strange events in their everyday lives, the time of the mob punctuating the expectant time of waiting for a bus, of taking a lunch break. Mobs may seem to occur where one was not planned. Their fleeting nature gestures toward ubiquity, as if any group of strangers might have just dissembled from performing some strange, collective action. This brings us back to the notion of the estrangement of the everyday, a quality inherent to the festival. The seeming randomness of the flash mob's activities implicates the entire urban landscape as an event site, the whole of the anonymous crowd as participants. Perhaps the flash mob is an analog for the internet, an expression of an invisible network that ties strangers together in a set of social interactions that are symbolically enacted outside of physical space.

Physical location becomes an essential factor in giving form to an event which has no purpose, but which is merely an assembly which seeks to interact with its surroundings. Yet, paradoxically, the qualities of the actual place chosen do not matter so much, for the flash mob is adaptive. The whole purpose of the inexplicable mob, the spontaneous, anonymous assembly, is to respond to something that can be found at the place of gathering. New York mobs worshipped a plastic dinosaur at a Toys R' Us, applauded on a hotel balcony near Grand Central Station, and chirped like birds in Central Park. Any place houses a potential event for the flash mob. With the emergence of new digital technologies, physical places have become enmeshed with virtual networks. As Reingold asserts, the new hybrid urban fabric consists of three elements: bodies, infrastructure, and infostructure.<sup>15</sup> The flash mob is an event which unites these elements in a way that is particularly parodic—perhaps even poetic. Spontaneous events erupting at unassuming urban sites not only expresses this interdependency of the physical and the virtual, but also renews the physicality of the site by encouraging its exploration by an outside social network. The individual qualities of a place, which would seem to be under assault from the homogenizing influences of media networks, actually explode into the foreground under the oc-



cupation of the flash mob. Unexpectedly, through the playful and creative employment of communications technologies, the physical space of the city becomes reinvigorated by the social capacity of virtual networks.

To me, the flash mob is an expression of the tether between cyberspace and physical space. It is the formation of an event without purpose, merely a playful expression of connection, of networks possible and real. Flash mobs have already found numerous uses in the political and commercial spheres, being employed for rallies by supporters of Howard Dean or promotionally by the rock band Jane's Addiction. However, the potential of the flash mob is not in its crystallization as an established format to hold planned events. Its potential is in the connectivity that it indicates, and the possibility for the very notion of "event" to transform as networks of participants are generated in ways not possible even ten years ago. "Groups of people using [digital] tools will gain new forms of social power, new ways to organize their interactions and exchanges just in time and just in place."<sup>16</sup> The flash mob marks the growth of spontaneity in events, the reinvigoration of social space, and, perhaps, a renewed interest in openly expressing the carnivalesque aspects of human nature. The flash mob is much like Bakhtin's description of the carnival: "It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play"<sup>17</sup>

## Notes:

1. <http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,59297,00.html>, 11/03
2. Brown, Robert J, *Manipulating the Ether* (London, Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Co, Inc, 1998), 205
3. Ibid , 227.
4. Miller, Edward D, *Emergency Broadcasting and 1930s American Radio* (Philadelphia Temple UP, 2003), 135
5. Brown, 221.
6. I am knowingly conflating two distinct concepts here: Bakhtin's notion of a "world inside out," and Freud's notion of "unheimlich," the uncanny or unhomely. As Bakhtin claims, the medieval consciousness is barely accessible to the modern mentality, so I have shifted to Freud's concept of the uncanny as a modern analog, a way to try to approach a modern version of the carnivalesque mentality that is no longer directly applicable. Edward D. Miller mentions this notion in reference to "War of the Worlds," while Anthony Vidler has written about the uncanny as it pertains to domestic space in *The Architectural Uncanny*
7. Brown, 232, quoting Houseman.
8. Duncombe, Stephen and Shepard, Ben, "Ricardo Dominguez, 'Electronic Disturbance' an Interview," *Cultural Resistance Reader*, Ed. Stephen Duncombe. (London, New York Verso, 2002), 388
9. Ibid
10. Ibid , 392.
11. Ibid , 392.
12. Reingold, Howard, *Smart Mobs*, (Cambridge, Ma Basic Books, 2002), 161
13. <http://www.geocities.com/londonflashmob/>, 11/03
14. Reingold, 176-7
15. Ibid , 2
16. Ibid , xii.
17. Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, (Cambridge, Ma MIT Press, 1968), 7.

Coryn Kempster  
**Time over Space**



1\_Still from "Morning 1 (Brushing)" video, 2003, color, 4m49s

Visual perception is formed by a rapid succession of images gleaned from a relatively large amount of space around us. Thus, we have no capacity for seeing different moments in time simultaneously: We are limited to our stubbornly linear vision forever moving forward through time. Memory grants us access to this historic information, though the data is difficult to represent and not entirely reliable. Conventional film and video technology allows more readily quantifiable access to the past, but like our own vision it is a fast progression of frozen images (30 frames per second in the case of video) from a relatively large amount of space (720 pixels wide).

What happens when this relationship is inverted and we exchange many glimpses of much space for a long look (24 seconds) at a minimal space (a column one pixel wide)? The world becomes strange and yet strangely familiar. Streetcars stretch across the horizon as buildings undulate and pedestrians melt while stout-

nosed cars bustle by. The intimate naiveté of a couple's first bath together is captured as their flesh turns to plastic and their movements implausibly morph their skin into the soupy mix of a multi-limbed, many-headed body. The stills represented here are from a series of video works collected under the title, "Motion Studies". Whether training the camera on urban scenes or the body, the focus is on the banal. The simple inversion of space over time is used to re-present ordinary in an extra-ordinary way so the viewer may re-experience simple things anew.

**Notes:**

Other video and new media artists who have been experimenting with similar technologies include (but are not necessarily limited to) Jussi Angeselevä with Ross Cooper, Michael Awad, AngusLeadley Brown, and Martin Reinhart

2\_ Still from "Motion Study #5 (Queen Street West)" video, 2003, color 16m27s



3\_ Still from "Motion Study #4 (Spadina Crescent)" video, 2003, color 12m33s



4\_ Still from "Motion Study #1 (Church Street)" video, 2003, color 2m21s



5\_ Still from "Take off my tie" video, 2003, color, 6m28s







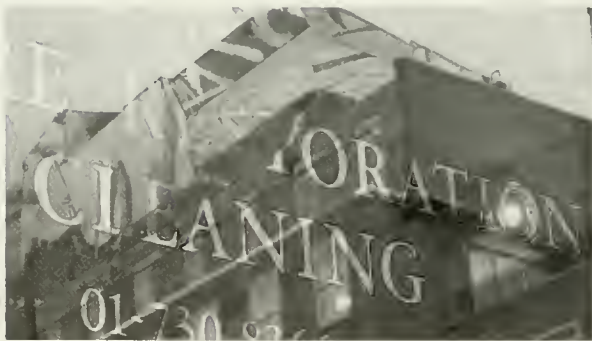






Ross Adams

## Reversals of Place: Two Proposals in Architectural Futility



The following two projects each attempt an ironic reversal of the urban conditions in which they are sited. The first project, set in New York City, proposes a second city to be constructed on top of the existing city as its mirror image. The second proposal aims to disrupt current gentrification processes in London by building an "unsavory eyesore" connecting neighborhoods that have recently undergone gentrification. These proposals, both somewhat outlandish in their scope, could be construed as fantastic commentaries that not only highlight the "invisible" practices of development at work in these cities, but also offer ways of turning such practices on their heads.

### A Narcissistic Proposal for New York

Capitalism at  $t_n$ : The end result of Late Capitalist Urbanism. A result so frozen in its own processes as to render the task of the Architect into a bathroom and kitchen consultant, and that of the Urbanist, into a bureaucrat. This project sets out to understand better the mechanisms behind this version of urbanism through an architecture which ultimately exposes key characteristics intrinsic to the machine of New York City.

I was initially inspired by Koolhaas' proposal that the uncanny juxtaposition between façade and interior program is fundamental to the success of New York City.<sup>1</sup> As such, this necessary dissociation between these elements becomes the architectural rule of Manhattan, as opposed to the exception. As a rule, this potentially reactive relationship is neutralized and, thus made banal. Given this architectural-scale phenomenon, can we observe similarly neutral juxtapositions at other scales? Can there exist a boundary separating two contrasting elements whereby the potential energy across this boundary is not absorbed and dissipated into the banal?

Looking at the scale of a block, one recalls Koolhaas' *City of the Captive Globe*, in which he posits that each block functions independently from one another to contain and foster its own identity.<sup>2</sup> He suggests that each block architecturally themes itself, that within a single Manhattan block each building operates cohesively with all others toward a single narrative. If this is true, what would define a "ridiculous" relationship between two buildings in New York City? Or does the overriding condition of this "Mutant Urbanism" allow for endless transposition of any Manhattan building from place to place without order or consequence?

In such a situation, one can potentially reveal the most about a given mechanism by introducing an architecture which opposes or perhaps provides a contradiction to the mechanism's observed character. In this case, the desire is to create an intervention whose function is to generate a boundary which segregates two entities within the city. In doing so, the separa-





tion must intensify the opposing characters of one condition to the other.

The given site of the project is on the rooftop of the Dia Center located on West 22nd Street, between 11th and 12th Avenues. Here, the artist Dan Graham has built an installation called *Two-Way Mirror*.<sup>3</sup> By alternating between reflection and transparency, the piece attempts to reposition the body of the viewer within the context of the surrounding urban roofscape. I propose to retrofit and conceptually project the *Two-Way Mirror*: Using this same semi-reflective glass and the Graham piece as a datum, a level glass membrane can be stretched across the entirety of Manhattan to create a second ground plane, a "newly conceived public space." The imposition of such a plane intends to create two sharply contrasting worlds: Below the plane exists a hyper-Manhattan where the city's narcissism is taken to an extreme and the entire city can now fully thrive in its own reflection. Above the plane, a new city has been created, one in which the "dogma" of the grid has been abolished and replaced by an open, uninhibited surface. On this surface the reflection of the sky hides the realities of the world below. Access is limited through retrofitting the *Two-Way Mirror* into an elevator which carries visitors across to The Anti-Manhattan.

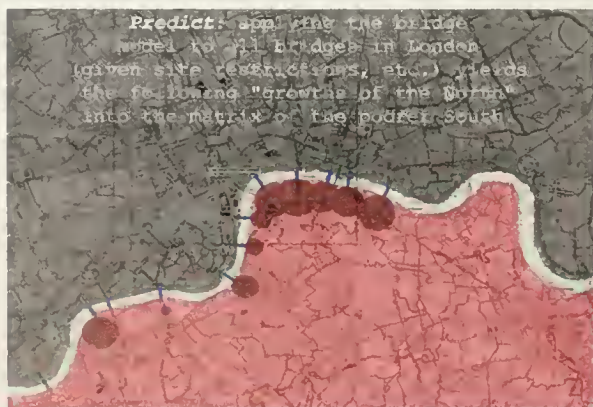
To realize this project would take great resources and cooperation—a highly impossible assumption. However it is in this step that the Visionary Project becomes an active tool. Therefore one must imagine a feasible way to develop such a proposal. As such, the Dia Center could establish a program open to the public, whereby individual real estate owners, moguls, and developers are offered membership for themselves and a limited number of guests in the largest art installation ever constructed. The membership "fee" is the extension of each building's existing structure to the specified height and structural requirements of the new glass plane (buildings higher than the proposed plane can donate lateral structure). The plane becomes something of a giant pseudo-timeshare for investors.

The expected reality, of course, is that the construction of the plane will reach a stunted point of homeostasis which destroys the proposed continuity. Thus, the fractures created by this discontinuity heighten the perceived value of one's contribution, deceptively bestowing a semblance of private ownership to the portion of glass supported above one's building. Furthermore, this utopian, communal public space is ultimately dead space: The city below becomes the spectacle. The "Hyper Manhattan" becomes a city of desire. Through both of these results, territories are defined, "plot-lines" drawn, and public space distorts into private peep shows of the city's former self. From this gaze, New Yorkers engage in a collective (yet individually-executed) experiment of self-valuation.

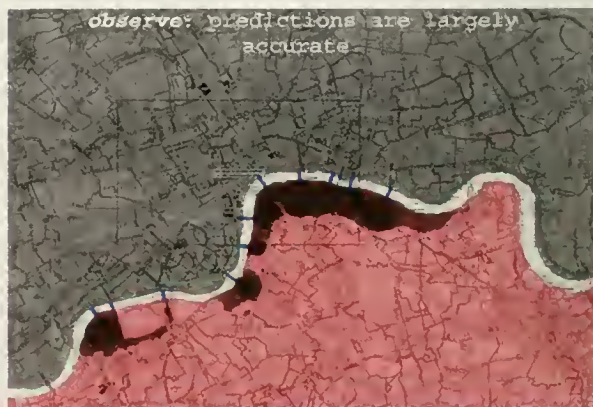
It is precisely the boundaries of ownership—those seemingly inactive edges that previously created the juxtapositions of the banal—which shatter the continuity of the imposed plane. Each building demands its own hegemony and the subsequent mapping of fractures projected onto the plane correlates to the mapping of property lines below. Thus the plane functions as a projection screen, revealing the presence (through fracture) of otherwise hidden lines from the city below, and realizing the power of the heretofore innocuous.

#### London Bridge: Proposal for an Unsavory Eyesore

This project takes as its critical premise that London's Thames River, while accumulating more and more monumental architectural objects (London Eye, Millennium Bridge, etc.) functions only in the service of division: In the presence of more and more architectural debris, North and South London are still severed by the quiet, muddy Thames. The task set forth by the studio asked for each participant to begin the project with a conceptually-directed site research portion, followed by a design proposal for a new type of "bridge."



Projected gentrification occurring at existing bridges.



Current Gentrification trends.

Within the scope of my own trajectory, I began to raise several critical issues: How are the current bridges over the Thames functioning, and how are they falling short of their purported connectivities? What is the role of such spectacular architecture with relationship to the division between North and South London? What are the spill-over effects of attempting these connections with such means? A secondary subtext can be read from the intentionally naive proposal of this project, which questions the effective performance and ultimate role of an architecture which attempts such "noble" social endeavors as the one proposed here.

My proposal first called for a footbridge across the Thames, providing direct access from Battersea's streets to Chelsea's rooftops. Located at the ends of the bridge, on top of existing residential buildings in Chelsea are Parasitic Low-Income Housing Units. Provided with each is a fire-escape-like stairway giving one hundred percent access to the street level from the housing units. The housing units stack clumsily on top of the existing structures underneath, creating what it anticipated to be an "unsavory eyesore." As Parasites, they aim to drive out their hosts, replacing them with former residents of Battersea, who can afford to live in the now devalued real-estate. The entire structure is temporary, remaining only until sufficient de-gentrification has occurred. The housing units will then be re-assembled elsewhere in order to disrupt and diversify other areas of economic homogeneity.

#### Notes:

- 1 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*. (New York: Oxford Univ Press: 1978), 100
- 2 *Ibid.*, 294 See also 97
- 3 Graham's Two-Way Mirror is a 32' square raised pavilion sided by semi-reflective glass walls of approximately 9' in height on each side. In the center of the pavilion is placed a cylinder of the same glass



Chelsea: The perpetual war on dirt.



Proposed footbridge and housing units in Chelsea



Proposed footbridge connecting rich and poor neighborhoods



The structure is temporary, lasting only long enough for de-gentrification to occur.



Ross Cisneros

## Courting Eden, Purging Rome



1\_ "Hiram's Temple Foretold"

A ghillie suit is in effect, a costume that, when draped over an assassin, serves to dissolve the subject's discernible edge into the larger natural theater of traveling moss, leaves, branches, and poetic ramblings of landscape. The course of my investigations regarding the transformation of a subject into omnipotent viewer coincided with a reconsideration of the Hudson River School in defining the American picturesque as an effeminate, benevolent promise held within the American Experiment. The adjacency of these preoccupations inevitably suffered a cross-contamination of concerns consequently producing a third, chimerical construct that became the source of my artwork.

The assassin connotes violence, which then connotes the masculine contained by the feminine veil of the Ghillie suit. The primary inversion works to rid the subject of the masculine and ensures the pacific and considerate animation required for stealth activity. A landscape painter located in the late nineteenth century in France, suffered a similar sexual inversion through the popular critique that positioned the artist as celi-

bate while displaying virility,<sup>1</sup> and effeminate while maintaining the role of creative genius claimed by the masculine.<sup>2</sup> I will go no further in stretching similarities between the landscape painter and the assassin other than to say that these paired androgynous subjects share the burden of omnipotence and prophetic capacity as seen through their own particular scope with some degree of violence when looking at, representing, and determining a subject's temporality.

The forests of the lived world as well as the allegorical are used for hiding. The forest, the pine barrens, tropical vegetation etc, are useful to both survivalist and poet in the performance of disappearing acts. Through a series of video documentation and photographic portraits, I have constructed a narrative that follows the Ghillie from its obscurity within the forest, a self-destructive necessity to detach itself from the picturesque, and ultimately the desire for gender specificity once this is accomplished. The Ghillie's first experience within its new urban landscape is the newly found ability to create modern primitives in the form of black crystalline models. The Ghillie does this by heaving and purging black mucus that contains the more defined sculptures that accumulate and form a plan view of a designed city. This purging was of interest to me in part by the physical responses to irrecoverable loss, which include the subject's necessity to vomit when The Real becomes greater than one's own conceptual capacity. The Ghillie becomes the grieving subject as one that has literally been inverted by the scalelessness of The Real. The Ghillie struggles with this and becomes a poet.

The Ghillie then moves into public and social space treating them more as test sites for activity. Among the activities described, included are a choreographed performance in a grocery store, an operatic encounter with post-modern architecture, more purging, and falling in love with a woman. In Emile Zola's novel *L'Oeuvre* his character Claude Lantier (the fictive Cézanne) moves from being the naive painter to falling in love with his model. As consequence to this relish of love, Lantier undergoes castration of his creativity as he struggles to make a single work of art and is unable to complete a single mas-

terpiece. The Ghillie is guarded from Zola's knife behind a veil of ambiguity, being of neither sex, and by straddling the psychosexual with angelic conformation. The phallicism of the angel is unresolved but undoubtedly remains an agency of power. Likewise, the narrative that I have constructed remains unresolved and allows the viewer to take liberties in imagining scores of alternate endings. As for the ending to this writing exercise, I hope that it may have incited the possibility that text already lies over the image world like a Ghillie.

**Notes:**

- 1 Karl Westphal, "Konträre Sexualempfindung," in *Sexual Inversion*, ed. Havelock Ellis (New York: Arno, 1975). The German physician Karl Westphal in 1869 invented the term "contrary sexual feeling" to describe homosexuality and mental illness
- 2. Along with the expectation of a successful performance, both are subject to a tumbling of variant gender roles that may be best described as a cartwheel of the collective gender both as a display of brute force and grace while literally turning the subject on its head and back again.



2\_ "The Undivided": Night vision surveillance follows the Ghillie in pursuit.



3\_ "The King's Grief" : The dark sage begins to heave and purge.





4\_ "The Announcement": The Ghillie youth sounds the horn and claims the forest.<sup>9</sup>

Lydia Kallipoliti

## Dross: Re-gensis of Diverse Matter



"We think of Picasso's bicycle seat (Bull's Head) of 1944.

'You remember that bull's head I exhibited recently? Out of handle bars and the bicycle seat I made a bull's head, which everybody recognized as a bull's head. Thus a metamorphosis was completed; and now I would like to see another metamorphosis take place in the opposite direction. Suppose my bull's head is thrown on the scrap heap. Perhaps some day a fellow will come along and say: 'Why there's something that would come in handy for the handle bars of my bicycle...' and so a double metamorphosis would have been achieved.'"<sup>1</sup>

The word *dross* refers to matter that is foreign, worn out and impure, it is a phantom material condition, that is unnoticeable to such an extent that it almost does not exist in our perception. Dross is worthless; it is an incidental, displaced material, a side-effect of chemical reactions that serves no purpose. Nevertheless, when it appears, a necessity is created for its removal. In time and through the use and misuse of language, the word has ended up signifying waste, impurity or any incongruous accumulation of disparate elements, pieces and material fragments.<sup>2</sup> However the etymological origin of the word refers to a residual substance that emerges in transitional material stages, such as the process of melting a metal or the process of sedimentation of a liquid.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, dross signifies more than an entropic landscape; it depicts material derailment and the production of displaced matter. Aboard the compelling will to subvert, invert, or transmute matter unceasingly to higher states, the occurrence of dross reminds us that pure operations of making seem to belong to the sphere of impossibility.

The purpose of analyzing the ingredients and the properties of dross substance lies beneath the wonder of metamorphic materials. "To the alchemist, there was no compelling reason to separate the chemical (material) dimension from the interpretive, symbolic or philosophical one."<sup>4</sup> Dross may be a spin-off of alchemical endeavors and a phantom material condition, but at the same time it is a product, or better stated, a by-product, of social reality, paraphrasing Donna Haraway.<sup>5</sup> The intrinsic properties of dross substance are analyzed to serve as a medium for the comprehension of a cultural phenomenon of incidentally displaced matter that is automatically rendered meaningless and serves no purpose whatsoever. Based on the perception of material impurity, this paper will attempt to encompass the generative potential of obsolete objects and spaces, or in other words waste material that is displaced culturally or functionally from either its previous or its original identity.

The cultural fabric for this condition revolves around the material ramifications of unprecedented technological evolutions in communications that have irreversibly shifted our production and consumption modes during the past two decades. The technological evolutions in computer software and hardware that have been producing novel tools have been in parallel producing immense quantities of 'techno-junk', tons of purposeless and indestructible matter, almost impossible to dispose of. During the past decade, concerns related to waste streams have slightly shifted in their orientation. Waste is no longer an issue that relates solely to quantity. It now also relates to the intricacy of the waste matter and its material composition. With the advent of highly advanced manufacturing methods and processes, many products that reach the end of



their useful lives quickly and unexpectedly, are highly complex in form and material composition, containing high amounts of embodied energy. Electronic waste, known as e-waste, is the largest growing industry of waste in a global scale.<sup>6</sup> Alongside the numbers, a personal computer "contains over 1,000 different substances, many of which are toxic, and create serious pollution upon disposal."<sup>7</sup> Its subsequent recycling becomes an excruciating and elusive task that requires numerous preparatory stages of shredding and segregating into constituent components and materials.<sup>8</sup> On the basis of the socio-political conditions directly linked to this emerging material reality, there seems to be a necessity to use defunct circuitboards as larger ready-made complexes or as components embedded in other materials for entirely new uses. Such a practice is supported through the production of materials by recombinant methods and assemblies.<sup>9</sup>

Spanning from the scale of obsolete objects to the scale of obsolete 'rooms' and 'buildings', the mundane reality of big defunct objects is overwhelming contemporary cities. Techno-junk is an emerging city-born condition; Defunct oil tanks, air-conditioning tubes, advertising billboards, containers and other apparatuses articulate a new urban language that violates the building envelope or attaches itself to it as an outgrowth. If one identifies in the city fabric a stratum of buildings that can be easily mapped due to their longevity, equivalently one could identify a stratum of mechanical appendages that cannot easily be mapped due to their 'ephemerality'. The significantly different lifetime of the two strata is the cause for an erosion of the outer building shell that cannot adapt to the change, taking place in it or around it. The unmappable urban condition of this "floating matter" in the city has been yet unexplored by con-

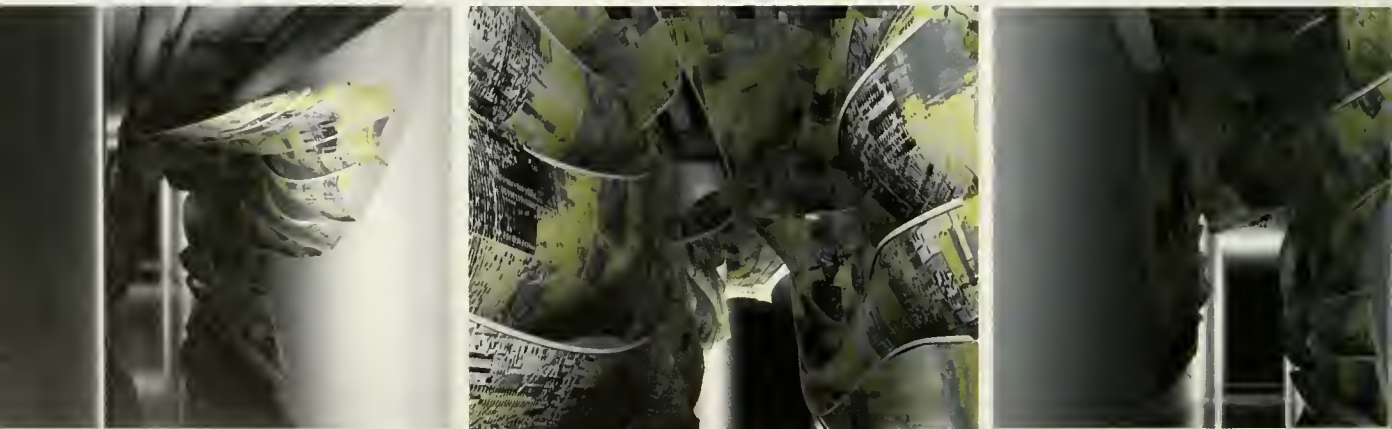
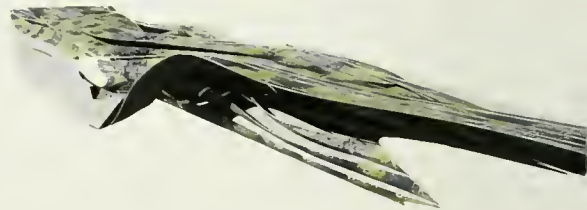
temporary architecture. The necessity of such a discourse is not only driven by the formulation of an ecological awareness, but also by the more visceral need to manipulate this kind of raw material and engage with 'techno-excrements' as an emerging city-born condition, derivative of the urban system's internal erosion.

### Re-genesis of Diverse Matter; A Design Post-Praxis

By engaging a strategy of irony as a legitimate method of approaching phenomena, Picasso asserts that there is no social or constructed reality "that we have to accept in toto,"<sup>10</sup> but a composite present realm consisted of fragments. A discourse of collaging fragments is ironic, because it resists utopia. It recognizes a "loss" in objects, buildings or urban domains that have misplaced their previous fixed identity and encompasses this condition as a generative potential. In this citation, meaning is not an inscribed, static quality, embedded in objects. Conversely, it is tacit and malleable, perpetually redefined, as the object is appropriated and reused, as it undergoes a metamorphosis. In this sense, the tactics of reuse is not solely an environmental strategy directed to the ethics of the world's salvation. It becomes a psycho-spatial or mental position, "fueling a reality of change, motion, action."<sup>11</sup> Along the same lines of thought, the condition of flow and unremitting transformation is characterized by Kepes as a fundamental reorientation of the 20th century. He explains that "the dominant matrix of nineteenth-century attitudes was the use of Marx's term 'reification'; relationships were interpreted in terms of things, objects or commodity values. Today a reversal of this attitude has begun to appear; there is a steadily increasing movement in sci-

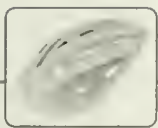


1\_ Case Studies in the reuse of building parts & components. Two paradigms of reuse are distinguished: 'collage' and 'molding'. (Work by Lo/Tek, Santiago Cirugeda Parejo and Rachel Whileread.)



2\_ "Pocket Wall" made of obsolete circuitboards and their molded by-products. Located in the basement infinite corridor of M.I.T, accommodating and recording the flux of obsolete items.





Design exploration >> [ molding ] *helmet\_* 'what does a helmet want to be?'



3\_ Matrix of a helmet that has run through different molding processes generating by-products.

ence and in art toward processes and systems that dematerialize the object world and discredit physical possessions. What scientists considered before as substance shaped into forms, and consequently understood as tangible objects, is now recognized as energies and their dynamic organization."<sup>12</sup>

Extenuating the strategy of appropriation, reuse, and transformation, dross praxis does not begin from scratch, but from the reality of an existing inoperative component, therefore, meaning is inevitably shifted. It can no longer be located in the process of representing an abstract concept, but in the act of manipulating matter and bonding new functions to objects that have lost their previous, fixed identity. Instead of a genesis of meaning, there is a regeneration of meaning and identity. A dross post-praxis dwells conceptually in what one could consider as the counterpart of parthenogenesis—the phenomenon of virgin birth. It emerges as a germinal creative drive, through the desire for transformation of existing information, concepts and physical entities; it engrafts a copiousness of thought, defying pure, virginal creations. If we assume that nothing emerges 'out of zero',<sup>13</sup> a post-praxis aims to retain the energy induced in creative systems and exploit the accumulative effect of knowledge and materiality

### Collage and Molding Operations

The issue of reuse has emerged as monumentally appealing, as an offspring of rapidly advancing industrialized processes. Mechanical reproduction was critically questioned by artists and literary critics of the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Walter Benjamin and Fernand Leger. Marcel Duchamp's declaration of the urinal as a work of art emancipated a syllogism that disconnected the reminiscence an object was carrying from its materiality. The object could then be viewed as 'raw material' utilized for further spatial deployments. In parallel, one of the main representatives of the Dada movement, Kurt Schwitters, gathered material from the street and collaged it to make art-fices in the interior of his apartment, in order to create the compelling work of the Hanover 'Merzbau' in Germany. Schwitters' declaration was to build out of nothing —merz—, meaning out of displaced material that experiences a loss of identity. The importance of Schwitters' artwork extends to the techniques of deploying the material he collected. He did not simply put it together in an additive manner. Instead, he created a second smooth membrane that sealed the realm of collage. Eventually, the compositions of the prosthetic art became latent building material, revealed locally through openings called 'grottos'. Schwitters' wrapping of his collected waste material depicts two fundamentally different principles that constitute simultaneously bipolar and inherent drives in creative praxis. These principles are collage and molding, where the first denotes an additive logic of juxtapositions and superimpositions and the latter denotes a procedural, evolving logic of transfusion.

Collage, as a process of bringing fragments together and interrogating their newly formed relationships in new assemblages, constitutes a prime artistic revolution of the twentieth century. Collage embeds the notion of reuse in an elemental sense. It is a practice that "violates 'property'; a kind of theft."<sup>14</sup> Although molding also involves the appropriation of existing objects and contexts, its case is vitally different. The obsolete matter is interrogated for its textural and formal potential and successively used either as a matrix or as material that can be plastically manipulated. Then the matrix is subjected to a process of many stages; a process that essentially feeds itself as molds and casts change roles in and out without a definitive ending. As Beatriz Colomina points out, "casting is an interrogation of space: violently pulling evidence out of it, torturing it, forcing a confession."<sup>15</sup> By putting the two principles of collage and moulding, in opposition, one can draw the following assumptions. If collage signifies the change of context, then molding signifies a material transfer; if collage's scope is a syntax change, then molding's scope is a substance change; if the intrinsic principle of collage is prosthesis of parts, then the intrinsic principle in molding is fusion of parts; if collage is about transformation, molding is about transmutation.

### Composite reuse

In the following projects, two vital strategic decisions are engaged: composite graft and plastic matter. The first principle —composite grafting— denotes the combination of actual obsolete objects with their molded by-products. Here, the term 'by-product' refers to new 'artificial' objects that can be formed by using an obsolete component as a reproductive matrix, or a mold where new materials can be cast. This operation functions under the premise that the occurring by-products will partially retain characteristics of the original object, but will have different properties, creating assembly lines of materials with local behaviors and properties according to the material synthesis of the by-products. Composite materials make a useful analogy to the strategy of a composite graft, they are composed of elements that work together to produce material properties that are different to the properties of those elements on their own. The method also touches on some of reuse's most deeply rooted conventions, such as the dogma that reuse should be structured as a precise analogue of the way that natural systems deal with their waste in closed loops. By considering the production of new components out of casting on found objects, artificiality becomes part of the equation for manipulating waste streams.

The second principle—plastic matter—refers to a condition of material indeterminacy, where material is malleable and deformed slightly from its original status, while retaining some of its primary characteristics. In reality, this condition occurs in a wide variety of thermoplastic polymers when heat is applied to them and they reach a mesophase where they are neither liquid

nor solid. Heating is a method that is considered distinct from any tools linked to the architectural design process; however the effects of heating in materials such as thermoplastic polymers that directly affects their chemical composition, could be described as a physical analogue of currently available digital tools.

In order to test my selected methodological operations, I have created a matrix of objects escalating in scale that can serve as a pool for design exploration. The items of this matrix are a circuitboard, a helmet, a plastic container, a bikelid, a watertank, a partition wall and a building part. The selection did not entail a scientific methodology, but a number of parameters were considered. Such parameters were the complexity in texture and form of the obsolete objects, notable hindrances in their disposability, frequency of finding the particular obsolete objects, material composition and other factors. Each object of the matrix ran through different digital molding processes, escalating in complexity and varying the relationship between the cast and the mold. Consequently, the objects themselves along with the by-products that emerge from the molding operations will be used in design experiments, each in a different site and location. In this sense, the matrix plays the role of a generating device for new material, new images and new concepts. Each obsolete object delivers innumerable and variable by-products that can either open the imagination through an apocalypse of the material plasticity in each case, or they can be directly used in new assemblages.

In the following two design experiments, dross conditions are identified and dross strategies are implemented:

The first project is sited in the main building of MIT, specifically, the basement of the "infinite corridor". This location has become a depositor and a pick-up point for obsolete electronics, such as outmoded computers and machinery, acquiring in time a dross function. My intention was to use some of the discarded items, circuitboards specifically, to create a pocket device that accommodates within it obsolete matter and also registers its flux in and out of the corridor. The installation was conceived as a second skin on the wall—a double layer created of circuitboards and elastomer circuitboard by-products—that can be opened and 'stuffed' with more obsolete items. The combining of flexible and rigid components successively into assembly lines of double-skin stripes imparts a heterogeneous performance to the device, whereby the stripes open up and deform in multiple ways according to diverse local material properties of the new skin.

The second project engages with sites of partition or blind walls that constitute an anomaly to the continuous building system of urban environments and at the same time meager structural points of the city, in the case of earthquakes. The intention was to create a device of obsolete components that would be

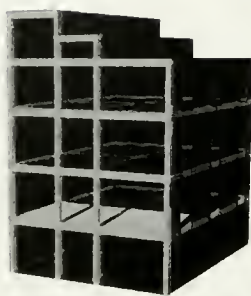
attached to the blind wall and have a twofold cause; the augmentation of the wall's structural capacity and the provision of provide an earthquake registration device, or a seismograph structural appendage. Towards this cause, obsolete helmets were applied as capsule appendages, releasing adhesives when an earthquake would occur; in parallel, helmet by-products were utilized to create a fabric, that could act as a safety net to withhold any damages and register the effect of the earthquake.

In these cases, both collage and molding operations were implemented. Molding was put in effect via the direct selection and use of the matrix's by-products; meaning through the use of the component interrogated in each case – circuitboard, helmet- as a matrix or a mold for the production of new elements with different material properties. Collage was put in effect via the repetition of different types of components joined in assembly lines. The combination of actual obsolete components with their occurring by-products –differentiated in texture, elasticity, form and performance- was a decision that initially made little sense, given the effectiveness of environmental beliefs, promoting the cautious reduction of haphazard material compositions. However, the process entailed a disclosure; the material produced out of this quasi-evolutionary logic could be described as a enhanced mosaic of new and preexisting properties, where the reuse of obsolete matter ceased to be trapped in its 'signification' as reused item. In this sense, the strategies of composite graft and plastic matter unravel an unorthodox field of adhoc ecology, meaning a stasis of reuse geared towards specific needs, places and purposes.<sup>16</sup> Withholding the burden of precise future predictions for a 'natural' or metabolic, closed-loop material reuse, composite graft could be useful in dealing with a new genealogy of materially intricate waste objects, so that they can be reused as they are; launched by the drive of material synthesis, rather than the task of cautiously segregating materials into their constituent components.

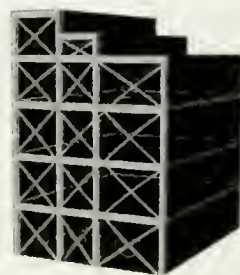
Notes:

1. Alfred Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of his Art*, (New York. Published for the Museum of Modern Art by Arno Press, 1946), 241
2. *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm>.
3. The etymology of the word 'dross' can be found in *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>. Middle English 'dros', is derivative from Old English 'drōs' 'DREGS' -dregs, grounds, settlements-sediment that has settled at the bottom of a liquid -a small amount of residue.
4. 'Alchemy' in *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>.
5. In this statement, I use Donna Haraway's strategy for positioning the concept of 'cyborg' in the context of current socio-political conditions and contemporary culture. Her original statement is: "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" In Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149
6. The rates of computer obsolescence are so extreme that "in the year of 2005, one computer will become obsolete for every new one put on the mar-





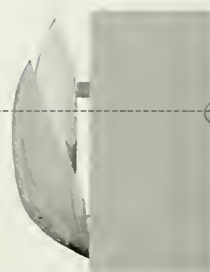
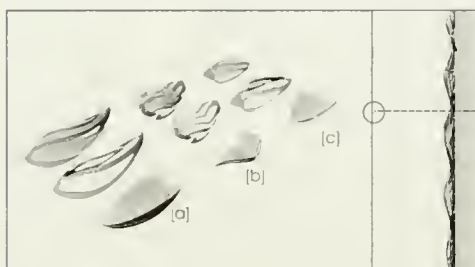
structural system

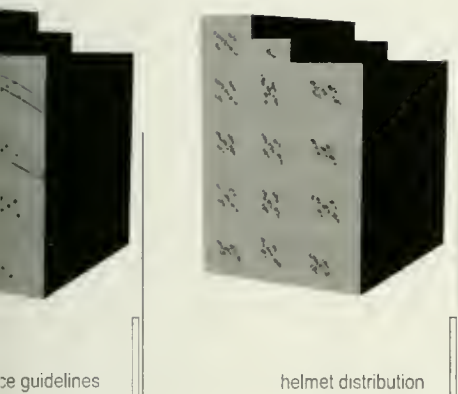


weak areas



drift





ce guidelines

helmet distribution



ket" Excerpt from Puckett Jim, Byster Leslie, Westervelt Sarah, Gutierrez Richard, Davis Sheila, Hussain Asma & Dutta Madhumitta, "Exporting Harm. The High-Tech Trashing of Asia". Prepared by The Basel Action Network (BAN) & Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (SVT SVTC), (February 25, 2002). online document, [http://www.svtc.org/resource/pubs/pub\\_index.html](http://www.svtc.org/resource/pubs/pub_index.html)

7 Ibid.

8 According to the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, computer recycling is new type of excruciating, hands-on labor that is widely either exported to Asia or takes place in prison houses. Online document, [http://www.svtc.org/resource/pubs/pub\\_index.htm](http://www.svtc.org/resource/pubs/pub_index.htm)

9 Sheila Kennedy remarks how "secondary and tertiary methods of post-industrial production produce recombinant materials: materials within materials. Sheet claddings made of chopped up or reconstituted bits of other materials the most inexpensive pressboards are made from the waste scraps of the rarest woods" In Sheila Kennedy & Christoph Grunenberg, *KVA: Material Misuse* (London: AA Publications, 2001), 63.

10 Colin Rowe & Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 149

11 Ibid.

12 Kepes Gyorgy, 'Art and Ecological Consciousness' in Gyorgy Kepes (ed.), *Arts of the Environment* (New York: George Braziller, 1972), 11.

13 David J. Furley argues that this philosophical position is credited to Democritus and the theory of 'atomism' in ancient Greek philosophy, in David J. Furley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967). According to Democritus advocated that "the nature of the eternal things is small existences (οὐσίαι) unlimited in number, and in addition to these he assumes space (τόπος) infinite in extent" Excerpt from Cyril Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc, 1964), 117

14 Gregory L. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 102

15. Beatriz Colomina, "I Dreamt I Was a Wall," in Rachel Whiteread: *Transient Spaces* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim, 2001), 71

16 'Adhoc ecology' is used as a term here, on the basis of the concept of 'adhocism' by Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver "Ad hoc means for this specific need or purpose". See Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism. The Case for Improvisation* (New York: Doubleday, Garden City, 1972).

4\_ 'Seismograph structural appendage' made of obsolete helmets and their molded by-products. Located in blind party walls, enhancing the structural capacity of a wall in the case of an earthquake, through the release of polymer adhesives.

Emmanuel Petit

## The Midlife Crisis of Architecture:

### A Theory of the Creative Leap

#### midlife crisis

noun: a period of emotional turmoil in middle age characterized especially by a strong desire for change [Merriam-Webster dictionary]

The series of "crises" in the architecture of the past thirty years might be a mystery to an outsider of the architectural discourse. It is a mystery further amplified by the fact that architects often claim to do "critical architecture" in response to the crisis. To an insider, the motivation for such a relentless obstinacy and resistance to resolve or otherwise go beyond such a crisis might be equally enigmatic, yet one doesn't choose the discursive background that one inherits from previous generations of insiders. Indeed, one could think that crisis is a situation that needs to be resolved to allow for another period of normality, but our extremely self-reflective architectural discourse, one will quickly

notice, has sustained itself by simulating a series of unresolved crises for the past decades.

Politicians abhor crises, because it reveals some shortcomings in their constructed connections between rhetoric and action. Still, crisis always benefits the executive power: it produces action without the need for established legal instruments. Instead of reasoning out the kind of action to be taken by an initial endorsement with a legal discourse and a subsequent re-affirmation by parliamentary decisions, in the urgency of a disaster, one tries to merely not create an irreparable legal offense while catering to the immediate needs. Furthermore, in "the reality" of a crisis or disaster, the executive power of action is measured against its performance, not against its conformity to a previously set framework. After so much talk about the changed political climate in the United States and elsewhere has lately been heard, some



Near misses, dead phones, last words: an oral history of 9/11 by Giuliani and his aides

explosion is enormous. I'm thinking, "Jesus Christ, we're under attack." There's a black man in the middle of the street. He has a yelling postcard. When he sees the people jumping, he runs

and harrowing search for a place to set up a new base of operations.

GIULIANI: I want to get through to the White House to reiterate that we need



2\_ "Blur" by Diller & Scofidio, Yverdon-les-bains 2002

1\_ New York Mayor R. Giuliani handling the crisis on 9/11/2001, Time Magazine



paradoxical inversions might characterize the way we conceptualize the "critical" aspect of architecture today.

Architecture behaves comparably to executive power in politics: architects love crises. If this would justify actions, which cannot fully be accounted for discursively or critically, architects are willing to bring about a crisis even artificially. In a frequent example of such a productive crisis, an architect is ready to blame a conceptual shortcoming on a swiftly approaching deadline. Deadlines are crucial to architects because they have the potential to transform critical weaknesses into creative licenses. Deadlines force the most critical minds into creative leaps, without which architecture cannot function. On the one hand, the occurrence of such leaps cannot really be integrated into any critical discourse, but on the other, change in architectural discourse depends largely on these leaps.

Architects do not only "suffer" because of deadlines that are imposed on them from the outside. Any architect loves to make artificial deadlines even tighter, by starting to work on projects late. At certain moments in the history of architecture, like at the Parisian *École des Beaux-Arts*, the imposition of deadlines was even made a structural component of the school curriculum; it seems that *charette* environment, where very quick decisions translate the initial and intuitive *esquisse* into the *rendu*, creates the necessary physical fatigue to make imaginative leaps slip by critical attention and bourgeois conformism. Deadlines are merely one example of such productive crises. The love for crisis is the romantic legacy at the basis of creativity during "modernity," recognizable within architecture and within culture in general. The sometimes artificially created confrontation with the sublime, in the form of an overwhelming and irrepressible "real obstacle," like the lack of time, has the power to make our preconceived concepts bend.

Architects' way of thinking has an ambivalent relationship to the Heideggerian concept of *Gelassenheit* [letting be]; on the one hand, architects can never "let be," because the design process asks for their constant active, resolute, and "willed" input, but in the face of an approaching deadline, suddenly they tolerate a certain residue of uncontrolled effects, which might in the end, ironically, invert into the very creative substance of the project. A momentary blindness in the process of designing might turn, to speak with literary critic Paul de Man, into a condition of maximum insight. So there is a desire to let some effects of excess be. As a form of executive power, architecture benefits from the paradox between the tactics of moving fast and uncritically, and the strategy of suspending decisions.

One of the prominent and visible architectural discussions in American academia capitalizes on this paradox: in face of a so-called "critical" architecture, there have been some efforts to create a "post-critical" discourse in architecture. But if indeed this "new" discourse explores the performative and projective aspects



3\_Mexico City Computer Center by Emilio Ambasz, published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 192, 1977

of theorizing, it cannot really be brought about through theoretical argumentations, academic deliberations, and through discursive diplomacy that points out differences from previous discourses. Because of criticality's reliance on differential thinking, the "post-critical" cannot use these same critical tools of argumentation and posit its teleological difference. It is clear that any post-critical that argues its way out of the critical, is defined from within the critical and, as a matter of fact, has been produced by the very same people who actually call themselves "critical" in an expression of their desire to have a new kind of crisis. The post-critical is nothing else than a search for the possibility of a new crisis within the critical debates that have become too repetitive, arcane, and unimaginative. One could think that, if you want to overcome the "difficult" argumentation that characterizes the intellectualized critical approach in architecture in favor of "performance" and "easiness," then perform, and stop arguing about performance! But again, the post-critical never *really* intended to go beyond the critical: it is merely another one of the simulated crises inscribed in this mode of architectural discourse.

Manfredo Tafuri—maybe the father of this legacy of criticality in architecture—along with his critical Marxist friends, loved the concept of crisis. In his introduction to *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, Tafuri leaves no doubt that crisis was to be ultimately productive, since it could multiply our views of history, origins, and languages, rather than petrify those within the limits of a singular ideology. The critical, together with the concept of crisis, was invented as a productive and projective tool. Yet, a major difference between the productive for Tafuri, and the current desire for the "projective," is the position of the architect towards capital. While we all admire the accomplishments of contemporary industrial design, and the ease with which ever more elegant and finely detailed computers and gadgets are produced in titanium or anodized aluminum, we feel architecture should and could reach "deeper" or "behind" a production, which depends on a version of global capital.

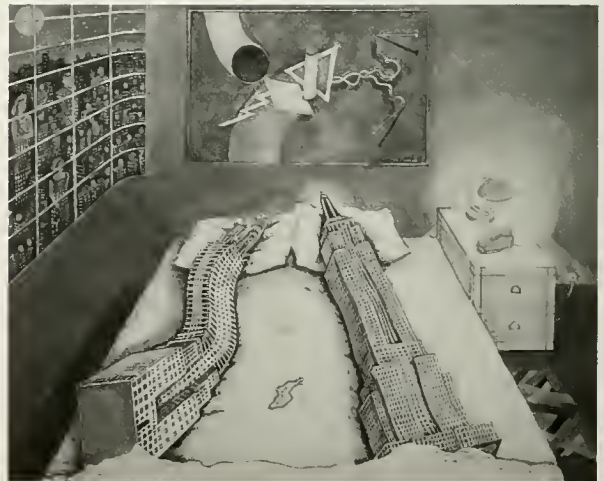
But again, architects do not *really* dislike the collaboration with capital, even if they give themselves an air of doing so. In fact, while they keep talking about the evil of such a system based on domination, surveillance, and control, they themselves have always been sustained by the very logic of control; the architect designs and decides, and a heavy human industry executes the decisions. The architects themselves, in revenge, are always controlled by capital. Even in the experiments of advocacy planning, the role of the architect as a demiurge has hardly been displaced. There have been attempts to question this critically, and to put the concept of control in crisis. But this crisis too was merely an attempt to project a new—maybe wittier—architecture, and only marginally was it staged as a real attack on social conditions. As an example of architects' ambivalent relationship to capital, how would one make a statement against "the spectacular" in architecture without creating an even greater spectacle, the production of which in turn is a beloved point of attack of architects and connected to the question of capitalism? Haven't we seen this in the fabulous Blur structure by Diller & Scofidio at the Swiss Expo 2002? How strange it is to observe how even a cloud of fog could be made into the logo of an exhibition! Emilio Ambasz had also made use of the animated figure of the fog in a computer technology park he designed for Mexico City as early as 1977. In Ambasz's project, the anecdotal image of the ever-changing fog was used as an icon for computer technology, since the materiality of the latter was too small to create the kind of constructivist spectacle that one could still admire at the World Exhibitions of the early twentieth century. The informe turned into the "image" of architecture.

Famously, Philip Johnson once proclaimed that he was a whore. Shocking some, amusing many, he meant to say that in order to be an architect, he needed a job. Rem Koolhaas was even more cynical about the question of architects' relationship with capital when he proposed a project of a "Floating Pool": a pool that is swimming in the ocean with forty architects/life saviors/communist officers "on board," all paradoxically swimming in the direction of the Kremlin, only to end up at the seed of capitalism, Manhattan. The idea is tenuously based on the equation "action equals reaction." If the swimmers crawled in one direction, the pool would produce a counterforce that propels its entire mass the opposite way. While the pool was almost invisible while submerged in the ocean, its water surface reflected the clouds of the sky, and thus made it a patch of heaven on earth—the cloud being a metaphor of continuous formal interpretation and the figure of vague definitions. Koolhaas produced a situation of crisis for the swimmers in his floating pool, a metaphor for all of us architects, yet he did it because it allowed him, symptomizing his desire for change, to set up a struggle with the known architectural assumptions of the time. The architectural activists would have resolved to "do something" about this perverse inversion of ideological relationships produced by Koolhaas's project; maybe Tafuri was referring to this work, when he labeled Koolhaas's projects "cynical jokes?" Koolhaas, himself, hardly disturbed by

the categorization of the project, relishes in his paradoxical blend of natural law and poetic invention: he created an artificial crisis based on a scientific fact (action equals reaction) as a pretext allowing a patch of heaven on earth.

In the face of such obvious expressions of the longing for sudden and "non-designed" change in the projects, and possibly culminating with a similar desire for change in the architect, himself reflecting the metropolitan nervousness and nihilist orientation of extreme intellectualization, one understands that we have left far behind the want to get inspired by the muse of architecture. Don't we feel ridiculous to even mention the muse, because it is too romantic an image of authenticity or merely a catchword embellishing a journalistic essay on the beauty of architecture, yet failing to excite our minds which we want to describe as sharp, dangerous, undercutting? Giedion might have wished for the muse to inspire the revolutionary kind of architect, when he said: "Our period demands a type of man who can restore the lost equilibrium between inner and outer reality."<sup>1</sup> But we can suspect that he, too, used his longing for a balance between thinking and feeling as a way of finding a crisis to serve his cause, and, for example, propose the semblance of synthesis as a counterpoint to the multiple eclecticism of the nineteenth century! Isn't the failing muse part of what Koolhaas described, when he said: "Through our ancient evolutionary equipment, our irrepressible attention span, we helplessly register, provide insight, squeeze meaning, read intention, we cannot stop making sense out of the utterly senseless..."<sup>2</sup> Yet, what we need for a more exciting architecture, one will presume, is in fact a situation of simulated crisis; not Giedion's "synthesis," but on the contrary, a new way of producing a rupture between the intellectual and the emotional

4. "Après l'amour" by Madelon Vriesendorp 1975, published in *Delirious New York*





realms. The most efficient means to bring this about might not be by conferring about mood or "affect" in front of a parliament-like constellation of representatives of "the critical," but by allowing the emotional turmoil to surface in whatever way it will.

Is it the fact that architects deal with matter, which might appear inert or static to unimaginative minds, that we have the desire for movement, change, catastrophe, and animation? One could also say that *because* architects deal with matter that will always obey the laws of *gravity*, we have the luxury to speculate about imaginative *volatility*! Isn't this characteristic of architecture an extravagance that politicians cannot have, since they need to counteract a constant pull into entropy by feeding the socio-political system with strategies of stability? Isn't thus architecture necessarily a site for experimentation—play, and probing—always exposed to the crisis of a possible failure? For this reason, Huinzinga's *Homo Ludens* might have been the most accurate architectural theory after the war. The "critical" in architecture could have been seen as yet another expression of the play-instinct of experimental architects: a simulation of crisis! While Tafuri lamented that the latest avant-garde architects pretended to be at civil war without having a Bastille to defend, why not trust that architecture does not only arrange physical spaces, but that it also configures the space inside people's minds in a playful manner, before mobilizing the artillery?

To make an analogy, one can call to mind a well-known manifestation of crisis in human psychology: the *midlife crisis*. The emotional turmoil associated with it arises most often when the burden of responsibility, accountability, and seriousness has become too large. As a reaction, an artificial crisis is being produced as an instigation for action, *any* action provided that it is against the seen as stifling and castrating existent regulations. The midlife crisis produces an interesting mixture of profound questioning, of action towards dramatic change, and of nonchalant "letting be." A classical expression of this emotional commotion is the emphasis on the happy ridicule, the sexual drive, not excluding the related physicality and all in view of the approaching deadline (i.e. crisis) of man's finitude.

Throughout the crisis of liberation from the gravity, i.e. the normativity, of modern architecture in the seventies, the parallel of the simulated "radicality" of architecture with the emotions of a midlife crisis is striking. Preceding other players on the cultural and social scene, shortly before the British comic group Monty Python came up with their film *The Meaning of Life*, architecture inquired into its meaning. What is the meaning of architecture's life? Some already mourned the death of architecture, when, for example, Aldo Rossi named his drawings "*Dieses ist lange her...*" or "*L'architecture assassinée*," tellingly dedicated to the serious Manfredo Tafuri. Despite Tafuri's warnings about escaping into what Roland Barthes called the "pleasure of the text," some hoped to make architecture meaningful again by teasing out its ridiculous and frivolous side.

If destabilization and animation is indeed what architects aspire to, what would be more animating than the catastrophe of being caught in adultery? Funnily, at a time when the architectural scene was decried as a repressive gentlemen's club, sexuality, as an archetypal model for paradoxical tension, became a privileged model for the production of crisis. Architecture seemed determined to borrow strategies of destabilization from the human midlife crisis, as it assimilated its body and its action, as in Madelon Vriesendorp's drawings "*Flagrant délit*" and "*Après l'amour*" which Rem Koolhaas published in *Delirious New York*, for example. Anthropomorphism in architecture became an attempt to make architecture perform, and—one more time—the most efficient way to do so was by simulating a crisis: the Chrysler and the Empire State buildings are caught in the act... they weren't planning and discussing their intention to transgress sexually and be caught; they just did it. With this improbable comment, the critical frame of the architectural discourse had to leap; and it did! A crisis, which this certainly represents, focuses on the perspective of buildings, which, through a newly gained promiscuity, are able to reproduce without the help of an architect; and such a crisis has the potential to question the profession as a whole. Who dares to think that the image of the "kissing towers" that we have seen in the discussion around the reconstruction of Ground Zero in New York and elsewhere, is disconnected from an architectural strand that goes back to Koolhaas's socio-architectural diagrams of *Delirious New York*? Didn't this crisis urge architects to rethink the relationship between buildings, so that the sexual analogy created a model for urbanization? And why not assume that the Chrysler building's casual, relaxed, and *negligée* posture on the bed in Vriesendorp's drawings—in a mode of "letting be"—contributed to the reintroduction of the curve into architecture? Her poetic portrayals put in crisis the gravity of modern architecture's straight line and orthogonal geometries, and opened the door to the curvilinear shapes of the "Dutch school."

The representation of the sexual has, however, lost the capacity to cause the emotional crisis that is needed to stimulate our imagination in search for new premises in architecture. Whereas the generation operating in the aftermath of Woodstock might have discovered that sex was their way of "promoting" crisis in the bourgeois values of the time, today we might be more aware of the possibility of a crisis in the non-sexual reproduction of cloning. This is a time after architecture's midlife crisis.

The prospect of cloning has produced more speculation of disaster in the contemporary headline news than sex. In "The Clone or the Degree Xerox of the Species," Jean Baudrillard writes that "cloning is itself a form of epidemic, of contagion, of metastasis of the species—of a species in the clutches of identical reproduction and infinite proliferation, beyond sex and death. The key event here is the liquidation of sexual reproduction and, as a result, of any differentiation of—and singular destiny for—the living being." Is the indifference that is resulting from cloning not the ultimate crisis of the "critical" project, while the





5\_ "Pig City" by MVRDV, 2001



6\_ "Pig City" by MVRDV, 2001

latter is ever searching for more differentiation and articulation? Should we not embrace the possibilities that cloning presents us with—as a way of introducing a new crisis! Isn't this double-bind orientation—to stick to the elaborated critical tools, and, at the same time, to expose these to the turmoil of a new crisis, the very kind of aporia architects are used to? After Giedion's desire for synthesis, grounded in the Hegelian triangular model of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, and after Koolhaas's quest for duality, i.e. the sexual model of two members, could *cloning* be the pretext for a contemporary architectural crisis, which elaborates on techniques of multiplication of sameness and indifference—the one—as opposed to either resolution or differentiation?

Today, crisis is still a powerful instrument as a way of causing architectural thought to leap. As an example, it is in this mode that MVRDV presents the provocative, grotesque, funny, and absurd man-made crisis in their project for a "Pig City". The premise for the project is introduced with a droll scientific tone; an emotionless calculation about organic farming, food consumption, pig mating, Dutch demographics and geography, introduce what its authors call "unsentimental pragmatism." This blend of Dutch research-driven design deals with the issue of cloning as it fantasizes about the prospect of having a massive amount of self-same creatures, the pigs, which need to be accommodated by a multitude of self-same spaces. What again was the inversion that Koolhaas talked about in *Delirious New York*: "Pragmatism so distorted becomes pure poetry"?

The project for Pig City is presented as a kind of fictitious deadline, a fatal ultimatum: unless we are able to erect seventy-six Pig Towers that could still be differentiated as architectural units in the Netherlands in the very near future, the time will come when we might not be able to escape the Armageddon of unarticulated, non-architectural space that cloned creatures, the pigs, are soliciting as a revenge on the humans. Not only their ammonia gases, but also the mere spatial proliferation that they will lay claim to, will help the pigs occupy seventy-five percent of the Netherlands! "Pig City Holland!" is our doom, the authors claim, if we don't manage to take architecture seriously by reflecting on its cloned reproduction, and figure out a way to deal with unarticulated, massive, spatial sameness. In this context, the "critical" is the state of mind of Cervantes' Don Quixote: there is no Bastille, but only plenty of windmills to chose from.

For architecture, the simulation of a lingering crisis has been very productive, at least, throughout the past thirty years. Of course, the recognition of a crisis always presupposes a self-conscious positioning after some normality, against which the crisis is felt as a crisis. In each case, crises make the desire for change feel like a necessity brought to the subject from the outside, only thus can we make believe that there pressing and factual parameters for our architectural "research." Only when we present ourselves as "unsentimentally pragmatic," as MVRDV did for "Pig City," do we escape the arbitrariness of expressionism, and get labeled as

serious planners. On the other hand, it is only because MVRDV take the risk of a search for paradoxes and absurdities, embedded in scientific calculations and statistical facts, that they manage to be amongst the most creative contemporary architects. The documentary genre of their project, and also of Koolhaas's, is inscribed within a "return of the real" that can also be identified in contemporary cinema with Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 911*, or Morgan Spurlock's *SuperSize Me*. Aren't Koolhaas's *SMLXL* and his text "Junkspace" bringing to light similar topics as Spurlock's documentary, although in a more sarcastic way?

The newest simulated crisis in architectural thinking proposes undisputed priority to vital impositions of the world outside of the subject's mind and outside of hermetic academic deliberations. The desire for some destabilizing fatalities that can be used to ground—tenuously at first—a new way of thinking in architecture, will give Jean Baudrillard's definition of a "fatal strategy" momentum:

"There is perhaps but one fatal strategy and only one: theory. And doubtless the only difference between a banal theory and a fatal theory is that in one strategy the subject still believes himself to be more cunning than the object, whereas in the other the object is considered more cunning, cynical, talented than the subject, for which it lies in wait. [...] What is inescapable is not desire, but the ironic presence of the object, its indifference and indifferent connections, its challenge, its seduction, and its disobedience to the symbolic order."<sup>3</sup>

If one thus wanted to escape the production of banal theories of architecture, one would have to be conscious of, and profit from, the incommensurability of historical and factual data; one would have to allow oneself to be genuinely and perversely surprised, rather than constantly attempt to be a coherent member of a certain intellectual school. This does not mean that one would need to try and introduce a period of "after theory" in architecture, and throw the baby—theory—out with the bath water only because, a few decades ago, the intellectualization of architecture has dispensed with the interest in materials, construction technologies, detailing, statistics, and other categories of the real. Baudrillard suggests replacing banal theories with fatal theories, which take into account the ineffability of the "object."

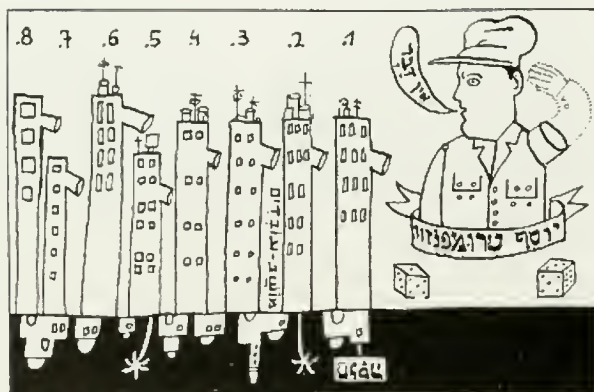
MVRDV, in their turn, have highlighted the absurdity of today's intellectual climate of legislation and financial dictates; instead of resisting them, as architects, they have extrapolated such regulatory logic to an extreme, ultimately benefiting from the intrinsic poetic paradoxes. "Pig City" is the very seed of architectural invention. As project, it negotiates the internal perversions to make its own coming plausible.

## Notes:

- 1 Sigfried Giedion, *Architecture, You and Me*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).
- 2 Rem Koolhaas "Junkspace," In: *October 100: Obsolescence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, Spring 2002).
- 3 Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*. First published in 1983 by Grasset, Paris. *Semiotext(e)*, (New York: Columbia University, 1990). "For a Principle of Evil."

Alona Nitzan-Shiftan / Curators: Ganit Mayslits and Udi Kassif

## Neuland: Disenchanted Utopias for Tel Aviv



1 \_ Dudu Geva, 'Yosef the Hero'

This essay was written in conjunction with the Neuland project that was exhibited in the Israeli Pavilion at the 9th Venice Biennale of Architecture. Neuland was created and curated by Ganit Mayslits and Udi Kassif and featured projects by six teams of architects.

### White City – White Land

Numerous street banners and huge advertisements in all major Israeli newspapers recently announced that "The people of Tel Aviv are walking around with their heads held high". "Now," the message continued, "the whole world knows why!"<sup>1</sup> The secret is the modernist core of Tel Aviv, and its stamp of authentication was UNESCO's declaration of the downtown 'White City' as a World Heritage Site. The celebrations were grand: A week of official ceremonies, exhibitions, and cruises inaugurated a campaign whose joy and pride testified to an almost desperate desire to remold the history of the Zionist project, to choose from it the virtues the world should see—the dream, the utopia, the white fleeting vision, the Bauhaus imprint.

Implicit in these celebrations was a plea to forget the painful cost of implementing the dream. It was a quest for pause, for beauty, for making news with modernist urbanism and enlightened preservation instead of occupation and terror. In the midst of the second Palestinian Intifada, at a time when the world was condemning Israel for crushing the houses of Rafiah, Israelis suddenly heard a different message. The world praised their state for having constructed rather than destroyed, for embodying a great utopia rather than shattering hope. The breach between Rafiah and Tel Aviv indicates and continuously demarcates the tensions in which Israelis are caught — the anxiety-ridden friction between Zionist redemption and oppression.

The collaborative project of Neuland, an "ironic utopia," is located in this tense zone. Rather than concentrating on the political conflict, in which news and public debate assault life with firm and inescapable 'facts', we wish to explore how these conflicts and public debates are replicated internally. Disillusioned with simplistic solutions and painfully aware of the inseparability of center and border, we open windows onto Israeli interiority, a zone where 'nation' and 'state', their history and identity, are constantly challenged. More poignantly, we explore, through the images and texts of the Neuland project, the ambivalent and urgent plea to break away from the Zionist project, to split the national body and escape to its eccentric ends.

In what follows, I explore the growing tension between the Zionist utopia and its costly implementation by focusing on two conditions of modern nationalism which Israel not only exemplifies, but in fact accentuates to absurdity. One is the definition of the national Self versus the Other; the second is the meshing of nation and state. I illustrate the impediment to these national programs via two episodes—a cartoon and a manifesto. Both clarify how the Zionist dream of a Jewish revival in the holy land of Palestine is necessarily trapped in the national logic of territorial settlement. The resultant fractured terrain is the one which the curators adopt as the paradoxical starting point for constructing Neuland. In so doing they remind us the extent to which the Zionist project was already ambivalent at its inception.



## Arab Line – Divided Land

A 1975 cartoon by Israeli artist Dudu Geva (figure 1) portrays a typical Zionist settlement, a socialist workers' housing estate built in the modern paradigm: separate, clean-lined towers with punched-out windows. The buildings occupy only the upper part of the cartoon. These light, airy buildings, drawn on white, empty paper, rise above a narrow, dense, black area below. Carved out of this black entity is another series of houses—low, bulky, arched and domed—an inverse image from the bisecting line downwards. The modernist buildings, we are thus reminded, did not emerge from a 'tabula rasa', on a land without people for a people without land, as Ben Gurion famously put it. The houses of the Palestinian village, on the ruins of which the Zionist settlement was built, indicate the histories and memories embedded in the land.

Imagining a national community is contingent on the logic of boundness—on a clear boundary which separates a horizontally defined group from the Other across the border against which it takes its form. The Other of Jewish Israeli culture, however, is not only the menacing Arab across the border. A more immediate Other, the Palestinian Arab, constitutes a border that runs underneath the Israeli polity in the form of a tangible recent past that impedes the effort to naturalize Jewish nativeness. Thus, the land which Zionists prefer to consider primarily for its fertility and real-estate potential becomes the ultimate mirror image of the Israeli. Geva's line between the village and the settlement suggests the cultural spatiality of the Green Line. It seems as if the latter runs not only horizontally between the territories of Israel and Palestine but, more subtly, between the layers of Israel and its Palestinian past. It becomes the inescapable shadow attached to every Zionist dream, an iron weight on the vision of the Zionist utopia.

## Tel Aviv State – A City-Land

Recently, a group of frustrated residents of Tel Aviv composed a heartening proposal. Why not, the rebels ask, separate Israel like in biblical times, and establish a new state around greater Tel Aviv? Citizens of the State of Tel Aviv would enjoy complete civil freedom without ethnic tension. They would rise an hour later, in the European time zone, and would use a 'Danro' currency (derived from the Dan region, where Tel Aviv is situated) to match the Euro of their western neighbors. Relieved from the financial burden of settlements and a huge security budget, they would enjoy economic prosperity for the pursuit of education, welfare and culture. "It may sound like wishful thinking," they admit. "Perhaps it is. But what a pleasure it would be to hear the right-wing leader speaker of the Knesset, Reuben Rivlin, speaking from a 'stable and glorious Jerusalem which is united forever', and to know that he is now a minister in a different, faraway land,"—the foreign country known as Israel.<sup>2</sup>



2\_ Poster, Israel's Ministry of Tourism, 1950's, the Zionist Archive.

These statements bluntly expose the current disenchantment with Jerusalem and its surrounding territories. Geographically biased, they indicate the damaged form of the nation-state—the failure to consolidate "the political space of the sovereign state and the cultural space of the nation."<sup>3</sup> The Israeli nation-building project was predicated on meshing the two sides of this poster (figure 2): the primordial sentiments of the nation—the authentic and timeless Jewish Jerusalem on the left, and the civic sentiments of the state—the progressive and modernist settlement on the right. Once realized, this nation-building project met its colonial complement in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. After the '67 war territorially unleashed the spirit of Israeli nationalism, the Israeli state could no longer conceal the ambiguity of its national-colonial practices, even from its own citizens. Haunted by the revealed distractive force of Jewish primordial sentiments, Israelis started focusing their desire on Tel Aviv. Let

Jerusalem have its nationalism, the manifesto suggests. Tel Aviv wants to be a modern, Hebrew-speaking City State.

Dissociating Tel Aviv from Israel, however, cuts to the heart of the modernist project that brought Jews to Ottoman and Mandate Palestine. This project advanced a liberating national cause while participating in the oppressive enterprise of settling the land of the "Other." Both nation-building and settlement "developed at one and the same time on a single colonial terrain" with no metropole to recede to.<sup>4</sup> In the context of the Israeli settler society, the wish to retreat from the project of colonization into its own modernist body thus requires an operation of greater magnitude. The celebrations of the White City and the Tel Aviv manifesto attempt not only to undo the seam between nation and state but, more urgently, to split the national body itself—to detach the dream from its authentication, the 'neuland' from its 'altland', the utopia from the settlement.

3\_ Neuland by Ganit Mayslits and Udi Kassif.



### Split Body – Neuland

Neuland Island is a state without a nation, a fantastic utopia without solid ground, Zionism without history. It is a clone of virtual land, which offers internal views into a conflicted national body. Wishfully neither holy nor contested, Tel Aviv is the ultimate clone because its genes, so to speak, are made of sand. There is no claim to rights in its 'genetic code'—it is presumably a purely Zionist creation. Modernists dwell on sand. In Tel Aviv, Israelis want to believe, there are no shadows, no chains on the wings of white balconies, no past beneath them. The obstacle that must be removed in order to achieve pure statehood is territorial continuity with the nation-state of Israel.

The island of Neuland challenges the aspiration to break from Geva's subterranean Palestinian village and from the strong foundations of Jaffa, the city to which Tel Aviv was initially appended as a suburb.<sup>5</sup> Clean and weightless, it is sent out into the purifying waters of the Mediterranean. Close to the shore, it resembles a crowd of holiday bathers, immersed to the waist, freed of the gravity of the everyday. It suggests displacing the older White City. If the 'Bauhaus Style' containers, the modern structures for new Jews, were built on sand, Neuland will be built on water, the ultimate expression of rootlessness. Released from the internal conflicted landscape of utopia and oppression, Neuland suggests an ironic, speculative and utterly impossible escape. In Neuland, the state that was envisioned by Theodore Herzl (the acclaimed founder of political Zionism), could finally find its appropriate setting. On a land which is the result of cartographic manipulation, Neuland curtains clone a vision without the nastiness of its implementation.

### Curators' Statement

Neuland was conceived in an act of irony. Formed as an inverted mirror image of Tel Aviv, the fictitious island of Neuland is placed opposite the real city as a provocative or inspiring alternative. Neuland offers a platform for self-reflection. It takes a break from reality, yet uses its actuality both as resource and objective.

One century after the publication of *Altneuland*, the utopian novel in which Theodor Herzl laid out his prophecy for the Jewish State, Israel finds itself a society conceived out of a utopian spirit of freedom and progress, now in a disintegrating turbulence of violence and aggression, which casts doubt on its basic moral existence. *Altneuland* is the legendary utopian vision, and also the origin of the strangely fabricated name *Tel Aviv* (Spring Mound). By contrast, Neuland sprouts out of the moral paradox of its implementation. Living this inherent paradox, we got weary of shattered dreams, fed up with bloody utopias. We can no longer serve as the operating arm of one great vision or another. We created Neuland as the ultimate site of our yearnings, a harmless territory for dreams and speculations.



Six teams of young architects were invited to use Neuland as a site for critical observations, an opportunity to juggle with the notions of utopia, and rethink urbanism. Using the polluted utopia as a starting point, Neuland becomes a breeding ground for new viewpoints, a site for irresponsible urbanism, alternative histories, seeds of hope, catastrophic scenarios, ironic oppositions, wild operations, and critical interventions. The Neuland project is an attempt to explore the potential of a pseudo utopian gesture as a critical tool. It proposes an alternative site for research in a culture where architecture operates as an institutionalized profession mostly serving the national agenda, sometimes aiming to negate it, but only rarely developing any cultural input that questions its own tools and motivations.

The following six projects reflect the tremendously varied motivations, backgrounds and passions of their creators. While all these projects operate within a politically charged and highly conflicted context, they attempt to go beyond the exteriority of the conflict and develop a cultural critique that challenges institutional practices of both the state and the profession. Departing from the semi-professional "problem-solving" method, they carve out a space for critical reflection, which cuts into the very heart and interiority of the conflicted Israeli culture and speculates on alternative tools of action.



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## Notes:

The essay was drawn from the texts "Tel Aviv Lands" and "Neuland," written for the catalogue of the *Israeli Pavilion, Back to the Sea*, eds. and curators Yael Moria and Sigal Barnir. Thanks to Yael and Sigal for the opportunity and support, to Uri Ram, Bruce Grant and Jonathan Hill for their scholarly insights, and to Dudu Geva for his image.

1 For recent studies on Tel Aviv's "Whiteness" see: Alona Nitzan-Shifan, "Whitened Houses," *Theory and Criticism*, 16, 2000, 227-232, Sharon Rotbard, *White City, Black City* (Tel Aviv: Bavel Publishers, forthcoming 2005), both Hebrew

2 Eli Zvuluni, "Medinat Gush Dan", (The State of the Dan Block) *Ha'aretz*, June 25, 2002, Hebrew

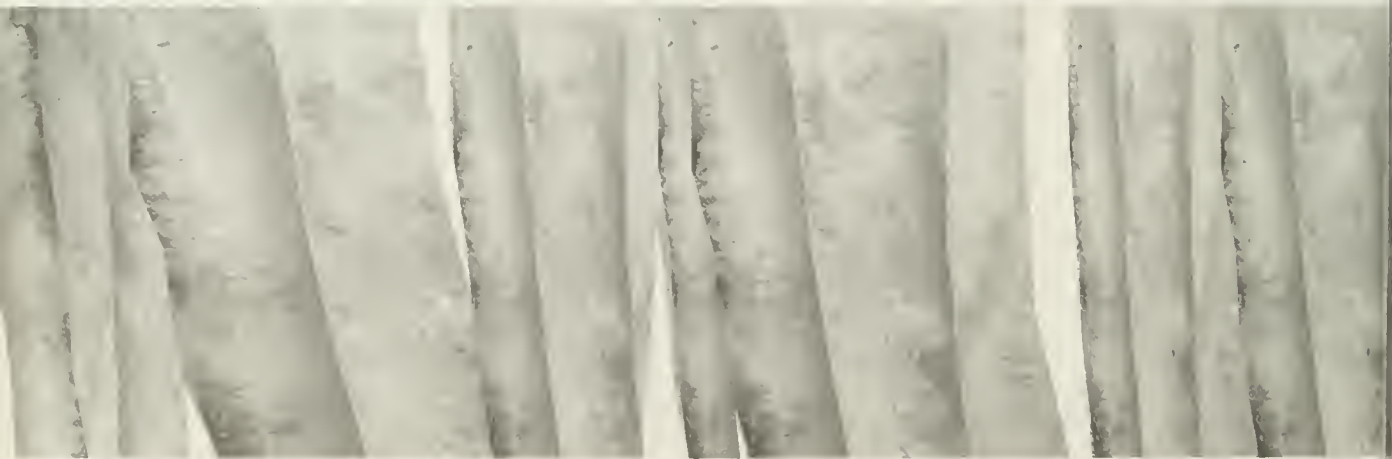
3 Adriana Kemp, "Borders, Space and National Identity in Israel", *Theory and Criticism*, no. 16 (2000) 17, in Hebrew

4 Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001): 5

5 See: Mark Levine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880-1948* (Berkeley Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

4\_urban-shift.net—created by the international group of architects, Gaston Zahr, Noa Pasharel-Haim, Alasdair Ross Graham, Oded Kidron, Birgit Glaetzel, and Omer Weissbein—takes the symbolic aspect of twinning cities and the familiar concept of extraterritorial spaces several stages further, to develop the possibilities for the transplant and exchange of urban branches of one city within another. Allowing for varying degrees of permanence, interaction, and connection, the project examines the probability of creating branches of Amman, Tokyo, Kiev, Frankfurt, and Bat Galim in Tel Aviv. Above image: "Amman - Tel Aviv: case study."







**5\_6\_Neuland rECOvery**—created by Galila Yavin and Tamar Zacharovitch—uses Neuland as an opportunity to push Tel Aviv's ecosystem to its inevitable collapse, and floods its coastal strip in order to speculate on an alternative future for the city. The experiment exposes the vulnerability of our environment whilst exploring the potential of healing processes. In a reality-cum-fantasy setting, sea salt is proposed as the new building material for Neuland's reconstruction.

**7\_ Insomnia**—created by Tamar Navon, Ifat Hollender-Emmer, and Michal Ilan—takes as its starting point the highly vibrant and dominant night scene in Tel Aviv, and focuses on the night's inherent power of creation. The project takes the imaginary island as an opportunity to challenge the supremacy of daytime practices in planning procedures. While illuminating the unique, dreamy, nightmarish, and sensual facets of night time, the project rethinks their position within the planning agenda and suggests an alternative index of materials and programs.





Tel Aviv land lottery? Photograph by Abraham Soskin, 1909.



Restaging of Lottery scene, 2004. Photograph by Jörg Gläser.

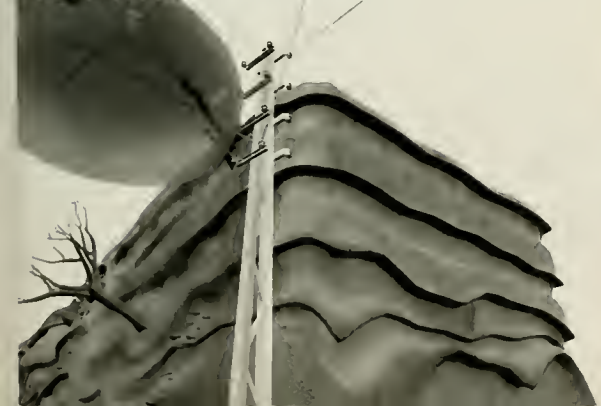
8\_9\_Alt/Neuland—created by Dan Koniak, Karina Tollman, Philipp Misselwitz, and Philipp Thomanek - is an investigation into the heterotopic nature of Tel Aviv, based on an analogy between Neuland, the fictitious island of 2004, with the empty dunes of 1909 upon which Tel Aviv was founded. The famous myth of the lottery scene in which the first plots of Tel Aviv were supposedly allotted was restaged this summer by a random group of new founding members for the island. The project book which maps the desires of these founders, provides a fascinating self-reflective document of a grassroots set of fantasies, which have become the building stones of the new island.



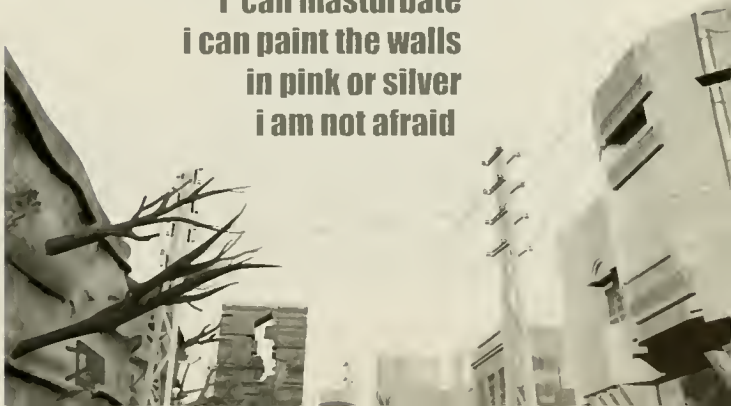
10\_11\_12\_13\_Suede! (Subtitled *Variations on a Fucked-Up Situation*) was created by Roei Hemed and Jonathan Dror. Stating that the citizens of Neuland can no longer exist as an all Jewish society in the land of Israel, the project offers the citizens of Neuland a choice: either to live on the street and concede the indoor spaces, or to create a new land in an upper-floor territory and renounce the outdoor spaces. By flipping and reversing inside and out, Suede! manipulates the Zionist existence and divides it ironically into two states: JEWGANDA, an all-indoors land; and ZIONSTINE, an all-outdoors land.



**a fool on the hill**  
**organic bauhaus**



**i own this place**  
**i can take off my clothes**  
**i can masturbate**  
**i can paint the walls**  
**in pink or silver**  
**i am not afraid**





14\_15\_16\_ Urban Quilt—created by Maor Roytman and Oren Ben Avraham—suggests Israel's most infamous underprivileged neighborhood as a ground for the inspection and challenge of urban renewal methods. In the process of mapping the neighborhood's laundry practices, deep-frying policies, or loitering routes, as well as its physical assets, the project offers a fresh outlook on means of intervention in the urban environment.





Leonardo Bonnani

## Re-Machining Domesticity: A Technological Inversion of Standards

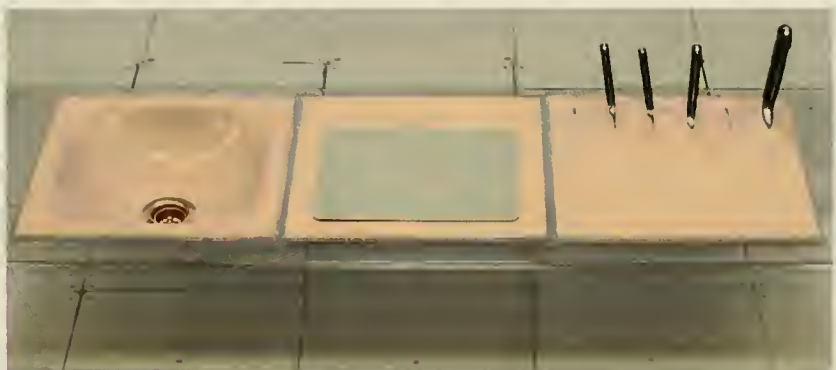


1\_ Dish Maker

Modern kitchens and bathrooms are adept at the art of denial. These two rooms, compared to other domestic spaces, are paradoxically the most intimately linked to our bodies and the most determined to deny their relationship to the body with the use of cold, hard materials, and their determination to preserve and protect against the "dangers" of natural cycles of life and decay. Waste is carried magically away: We need not confront the detritus of our own bodies and and lives, or think of where such things end up. Water, heat, and cold appear quietly and instantly at the flick of a switch, devoid of their attendant sensory associations. Food is processed and packaged to appear as sterile and unnatural

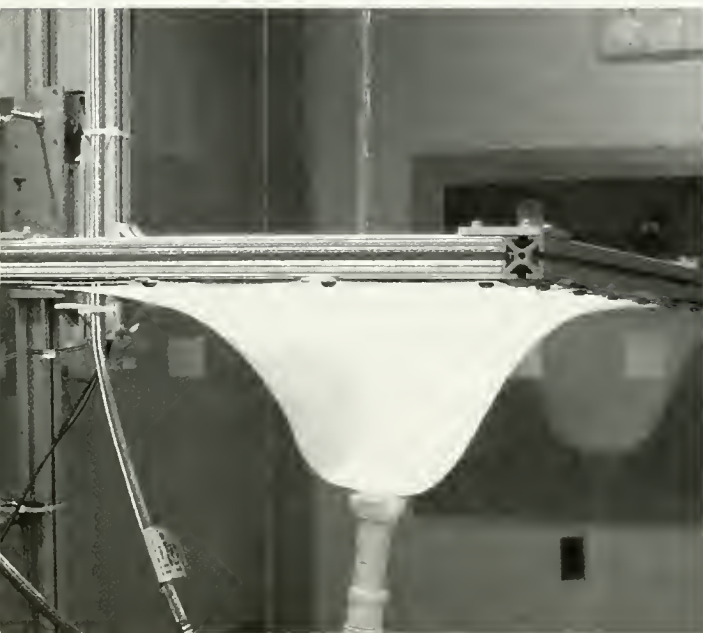
as possible. The following projects each challenge in some way traditional relationships between domestic appliances and life processes. Towards this goal, the very notion of *domestic appliance* is re-imagined as something which might mediate the distance between "machine" and "nature," rather than creating ever starker dichotomies.

The concealments enacted by our appliances are at least in part due to deliberate design. Modernists like Richard Neutra, to name just one well-known designer, believed that modern domestic technologies heralded a new era of ascetic bodily health and purity. For him, hard, sharp geometries and spar-



2\_3\_ Soft Sink





#### 4\_5\_ Soft Sink

klings white surfaces formed an architectural repudiation of natural corporeal filth and decay. Kitchens and bathrooms have thus evolved into static, hermetic spaces whose materialities deny the physical processes of production and waste on which they rely. Modern systems for heating and refrigerating operate so quietly that we don't often realize the great quantities of energy being expended. Hard, durable materials imply hygiene, but also subliminally suggest a desire to deny the body itself, with its fleshy softness and ultimate tendency towards decay. Food is processed, packaged and stored in such ways that we forget its very organic-ness: how it is grown, harvested, and how it ultimately rots away. The last century-and-a-half of domestic technological developments has been marked by an ever-increasing rejection of the processes of living, consuming, and recycling. In response, I propose a series of material inversions that seek to foster a new intimacy with our kitchens and bathrooms by replacing their ascetic "machine-like" functionality with a visceral physicality that tries to deal more explicitly with natural processes, bodily desires, and sensory associations.

#### Soft Sink

Imagine for a moment bathing in a tub whose shape responded to the movements and posture of your body, that swelled and grew heavy with the weight of water, that shriveled when

drained empty, and whose surfaces heated up like an old-fashioned hot water bottle. Now recall your fiberglass or ceramic-tiled shower stall or tub: Modern kitchen and bathroom fixtures are of course made of rigid materials because of the durability and hygiene they provide. As a result, kitchens and bathrooms are cold and repelling to the touch, not to mention dangerous. The choice of such materials is unique to plumbing fixtures and kitchen counters. Nowhere else in the house are surfaces that contact the body so un-human. Soft Sink is an attempt to replace the hard surfaces of sinks, countertops and bathrooms fixtures with a softer, more sensuous material. Silicone rubber is a remarkable elastomer that has the softness and flexibility of human flesh, is chemically inert, and maintains its properties through a wide range of temperatures. Initially, it was only economically feasible for surgical implants and other critical applications. Soft Sink seeks to expand the use of silicone as a surfacing material. The first prototype explores a temporary solution, whereby a cast silicone skin is laid over existing sinks to absorb impact and reduce noise. The material is so soft that it can be easily cut, and should be replaced every few months. In the second prototype, the silicone serves a structural role as a much larger sink membrane suspended from a rigid frame.

To uniformly distribute loading in the second prototype, the mold was produced by gently slumping a sheet of acrylic. The resulting catenary form appears more organic than tradition-

al sinks, and only deforms minimally when full of water. To increase tear resistance the silicone was embedded with an elastic mesh fabric. Future prototypes will completely replace the rigid exoskeleton in order to produce large, soft, fleshy, encompassing objects like bathtubs and toilets. The next prototype will consist of a rigid endoskeleton surrounded by muscle-like foam encased in a silicone skin. These objects will not have the weight, fixity, or cost of traditional fixtures. They can become mobile and temporary to fit the requirements of individual users in a way more similar to fashion and consumer electronics. In exchange, they will be safer, more comfortable, and warmer to the touch. For the first time, the hygiene and convenience of modern fixtures attempt to mimic the softness and warmth of biological tissue. Domestic machinery thus begins to affirm rather than reject the human body it purports to serve.

**HeatSink**

Water appears at our taps without any evidence of the energy consumed on its journey or embodied by its temperature. A far cry from the comforting whistle of a teapot, or the refreshing sight of a ladel of cool water drawn straight from the well, the kitchen tap as a mechanical device presents hot water and cold water as the same substance, devoid of their bodily and physical associations. HeatSink seeks to re-invent the physical pleasure of water through an operation of synesthesia. A small solid-state device attached to the faucet aerator illuminates the stream of water with colored light that varies according to the temperature of the water. The water becomes a graphical user interface that adds a layer of information without interfering with the function of the faucet. The invisible physicality of heat and cold are made manifest, in the same way that the whistle of a teapot has become automatically associated with heat and its attendant joys and comforts. This simple device demonstrates how new technologies can create sensory experiences that connect us with the processes that nourish and clean our bodies.

**Dish Maker**

Mass production necessitates that products have a single form (and often a single use) while in our possession. For this reason we fill our closets, cabinets and garages with collections of things in case we eventually need one of them. Material and labor are wasted in the eternal washing and storing of such goods. What if we could produce what we needed when we needed it, and recycle it into something else when we have finished using it? Dish Maker seeks to replace cabinets and dishwashers with a micro-factory that produces a variety of dishes on demand and recycles them when you are finished eating. By taking advantage of shape memory properties of

amorphous polymers, the appliance consumes little energy to shape and re-shape plastic into plates, bowls and cups. Dish Maker softens acrylic pucks at low temperature and gently deforms them to a variable depth. Once the plastic is reheated under slight pressure, it returns to its original flat shape for storage. Unlike industrial processes that melt plastic, Dish-Maker uses considerably less energy, does not release toxic substances and contains an entire "cradle-to-cradle" product life-cycle within itself.

**Living Food**

Like factories, farms and their associated lifestyle have been reduced and relocated away from residential areas. Subsequently, fresh fruits and vegetables have all but disappeared from our urban or suburban homes. In their stead, we buy unripe fruits and vegetables in bulk and store them in refrigerators where they lose their flavor, their crispness, and juice, suspended in an unnatural state of preservation. Or we resort to frozen packages and canned items that retain none of the color, texture, or beauty of the original produce. What if food could not only be preserved, but easily grown in the kitchen? Living Food seeks to replace the refrigerator with a life-support system for store-bought fruits and vegetables without the space requirements and climatic restraints associated with outdoor gardening. Rather than slow the metabolism of plants, this live storage solution provides them with a bright, humid environment where they can stabilize and even begin to grow roots and multiply. Living Food produces high-intensity light with relatively little energy consumption by targeting peak absorption wavelengths. Vegetables and plants are fed nutrient solutions by aeroponic misting (if they have no roots) or by a polymer gel (if they have roots). Early versions have tripled the life of leafy greens such as basil, while scallions and other plants with roots can keep growing for months. For houses with gas stoves, the carbon dioxide generated by the stove could be ducted through the living food cabinet to enrich the plants' atmosphere. It can significantly improve the quality of what we eat on a daily basis.

**Conclusion**

The mechanisms that have allowed us to enjoy modern bathrooms and kitchens have spurred a denial of the processes that take place in these spaces. The materials, forms and traditions we have come to expect in these spaces deny the sensory nature of cleansing, consuming, and disposing. New materials and processes can bring back a sense of humanity to these harsh, hermetic environments. By re-appropriating some elements of agrarian and nomadic life into the home, we can gain a new sensory experience of the things around us. The prototypes in this paper reveal how profoundly our spaces are



6\_ Heat Sink

determined by ideas that arose in the industrial revolution and how significantly our environment can change if we question those material assumptions. New materials and processes can bring back the experience of softness, organic-ness, and sensuous physicality without relinquishing the convenience associated with modern domestic machinery. Instead of bumping against porcelain in the morning and scalding ourselves at the sink, shattering dishes, and picking through rotten lettuce, we can be surrounded by appliances that accommodate our

bodies, respond to them, delight them, and ultimately imitate their designs and desires.

#### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Ted Selker and the Counter Intelligence Special Interest Group of the MIT Media Lab. These material inversions would not have been possible without invaluable help from: Josh Barandon, Chia-Hsun Lee, Connie Cheng, Noah Luken, Peter Testa, Sam Sarcia, Subodh Paudel, Oliver Venn, Manas Mittal, Runye Zha, Darragh Buckley, Scott Barth, Diana Sim, Jon Wetzel.

7\_ Living Food Machine





Tamar Tembeck

## Mona Hatoum's Corporeal Xenology

"Between the speechless pain of the actual stranger and the sequestered fear of one's own strangeness lies the real frontier to be challenged. Can art operate as a revelatory, expressive, and interrogative passage through such a frontier? Can it be an inspiration, provocation, and opening act for a new form of communication in a nonxenophobic community? If the stranger is a prophet who interrupts history, today's artists and designers should help the prophet by designing special equipment for such an intervention."<sup>1</sup>

As an immigrant who creates, Mona Hatoum conflates both Krzysztof Wodiczko's roles of the prophet and the artist in the passage above. Her 'interruptions of history' manifest themselves in the present moment, through installations that challenge viewers' senses of corporeal and ontological autonomy. Her praxis, like Wodiczko's, is one of "xenology," a field of knowledge which Wodiczko has described as an "external and internal displacement [that] is about crossing the boundaries inside of yourself."<sup>2</sup> By injecting the unfamiliar into notions of home, and revealing the strangeness in each spectator, Hatoum's interdisciplinary artworks help to uproot the very logic of xenophobia—How can one be afraid of the stranger if the stranger is within?

In this article, I apply the language of diaspora studies to a reading of Mona Hatoum's work. To this end, I transpose the notion of home onto the body as the seat or 'home' of the self, and read subjecthood as a microcosm of the nation-as-home. I note the conflation of a national ideal onto a physical territory, and its parallel conflation of the self to the physical confines of the body. In this construction, "diaspora" refers to the process of othering, in a variation on diasporic "rupture," which I link to identity becoming. The notion of "return," so crucial to the diasporic imaginary, is replaced by a new dwelling-in-diaspora-as-home. This article addresses how continual ruptures of the body and self via border transgression in Hatoum's video installation *Corps étranger* perform a positive diasporic experience and contribute to an auto-renewal of identity.

As a Beirut-born Palestinian exiled in London, Hatoum speaks as a stranger through an adopted tongue. She has adapted



the European and masculine language of Minimalism only to subvert its foundational tenets by injecting anatomical discrepancies into the minimal grid. Hatoum practices resistance from the inside out (as an established artist), and from the outside in (as an immigrant to London). Her linguistic and aesthetic hybridization of a 'corporealized grid' becomes explicit through its *iteration*: in the acts of production and reception of her relational works.



It is precisely thanks to the performative dimension of her installations that Hatoum's oeuvre can be read as manifesting a certain *counter-musealization*.<sup>3</sup> Rather than being cemented in memory, nostalgia, or fixed identity, the works find their meaning through present re-iteration, in the symbolic exchange between art object and art receptor. Taken strictly in their fixity, within their physical boundaries or as objects of the past, the works become mere corpses, traces of themselves. Their investment of meaningful 'life' is contingent upon the physical presence of a spectator. For in Hatoum's practice, it is both the identity of the author and of the artwork that is "no longer completely within the root but also in Relation," to borrow Edouard Glissant's words.<sup>4</sup>

Hatoum's 1994 *Corps étranger* is not, at first glance, directly tied to the themes of diaspora and exile or east / west relations. However, a brief analysis of the corporeal foundations of identity via psychoanalytic theory, and an interpretation of the discursive mechanisms embedded in the work will hopefully draw parallels between the operation of *Corps étranger* and its manifestation of a certain "diasporic consciousness."<sup>5</sup>

### **Within the Other / The Other Within: The Body and the Foundations of Identity**

If the body were to be regarded as a topographical map, one would find that its nation or selfhood is delineated by the parameters of its epidermis. Like the often abrupt and artificial boundaries created to separate countries, the epidermis is the normative delineation of the end of one's self. Yet, countless

studies of proxemics have shown that the size of personal social spheres varies significantly from one culture to another, and that these spheres necessarily trespass the boundary of skin. As national borders are guarded, so is the epidermis: protecting the self from the harm of the world, insulating the core from external contagion, and serving as the iconic distinction dividing 'me' from 'you' or 'us' from 'them'. The body is indeed a battleground, whose very propriety often requires an engagement in 'civil' wars.

This battle appears, amongst other things, in the daily acts of self-representation which individuals undergo in order to enter the world: "civilization carves meanings onto and out of bodies," writes Elizabeth Grosz.<sup>6</sup> Rituals dressed in the guise of self-pampering actually operate small-scale amputations to the boundaries of the body: cutting, tucking, waxing, cropping, and even washing, imply the removal of tarnishing elements. Conversely, insertions are made to compensate for lacks in height and in curves, and to highlight and balance features. Would the skin then be a malleable frontier between self and other? If so, who or what monitors the extent and direction of its malleability?

"The discipline and normalization of the female body," writes Susan Bordo, "[...] has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control".<sup>7</sup> Bodily control in its subtler forms via the cosmetics and media industries has become a profitable venture. Such patrolling of corporeal borders creates a form of suggestive surveillance that operates surreptitiously, even in non-emergency states. Policed boundaries are to be maintained at all times, and what's more, they are to conform to a moral-aesthetic ideal that comes from outside oneself. The body, which delineates one person's subjecthood, is thus easily transformed into an object for another.

Such a transformation also occurs in the very construction of subjecthood. According to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the maturation of identity depends on a synthesizing perception of a managed corporeal self, and an imposed optical control over the otherwise partially seen body. In the passage through the mirror stage, the subject perceives the body-object as being distinct from the rest of the world, and whole. Identity, therefore, is grounded in the coherence of one's objective bodily image. The epidermal border strengthens that coherence, as do the impenetrable borders of patrolled nation-states with regards to national identity. But it is clear that this somatic and moral integrity is managed both from within and from without, and that the child only sees herself as whole *because* she is distinct from that which is outside her. Thus, without an acknowledgement of the other, there can be no self. What's more, self-othering, or subjective objectification, is part and parcel of the materialization of self.

Lacanian theory shows us that the geography of the body is insufficient in delineating the identity territory of self. Paral-

els to this geographical insufficiency can be drawn from the discourse of diaspora in relation to nation-states. Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin write:

"As the very terms "state" implies, nation-statism as a global and universal logic seeks to fix ethnically (genealogically and culturally) homogenous human groups within nonoverlapping, neatly bounded, and permanent geographical boundaries. It is this neat mapping of nations onto non-overlapping and unique global spaces that the powers of diaspora confront, by which they are manipulated, and which they manipulate in turn."<sup>8</sup>

"The powers of diaspora" reveal the tensions between state mappings and overlapping ethnic identities. Diasporic consciousness imaginatively inhabits spaces that are both painfully literal and blissfully figurative. These imaginary spaces do not necessarily reproduce the course of actual landmarks or geopolitical boundaries.

In the same vein, what of the seepages, both material and moral, which transgress the imposed boundaries of the body? What of the abject excretions of the body, which, like the spiritual ties of the immigrant to a homeland, belong *neither here nor there*? The insurance of coherent identity through the sealing of skin, like the creation of national identity through the implementation of borders, is little more than a masquerade. Human bodies leak and grow out of themselves. Nationhood is not confined to a 'homogenous' interiority. Yet the symbolic power attached to abject objects – those 'illegal' migrants that trouble the taxonomy of the Symbolic Order – is so strong that it can lead to psychosis. In the case of nations, to security certificates.

In this light, *Corps étranger* could be read as a "disordering practice" on multiple levels: within cultural institutions, within the art viewing exchange, and here, within the bodies of both the author and spectator.<sup>9</sup> Putting forward abject bodies in museums that traditionally exhibit bodily ideals is but one of these acts of conscious disorder. What interests me here is the disorder it provokes for stable conceptions of the self, and how this might be read as a larger proposal for ways of conceiving identity in terms that resist essentialization.

## Foreigned Bodies

*Corps étranger* consists of a small, white, cylindrical tower with two narrow opposite entrances. Inside, a video image is projected onto a circle on the floor, and a narrow passage between the projection and the padded walls leaves room for the spectator. With their backs against the wall to view the image, Frances Morris has identified the spectators' positions as "the classic pose of victim."<sup>10</sup> Critics' comments seize upon the witness / victim duality that is at the heart of *Corps étranger's*

mechanism of reception, which could be read as a push and pull inside and outside of oneself.

The video projection consists of a visual mapping of Hatoum's body. The camera grips the external epidermis, scanning in one long close-up all the details of her physical shell, then probes her insides, entering through all cavities and making visible that which normally cannot be seen. Turning her body inside out like a glove, spreading its surface to render it in a two-dimensional map, Hatoum offers a variation on the self-portrait in *Corps étranger*. In order to chart the undiscovered countries of her anatomy, both the video image and the soundtrack have been recorded with specialized medical equipment, endoscopes and ultrasounds. The soundtrack is an irregular recording of Hatoum's body, breaths, and heartbeats, whose sonorities vary according to the location of the microphone.

The cylindrical space architecturally reproduces and magnifies the physical environment explored by the microphones and cameras. Standing against its padded walls as a spectator is like being inside Hatoum's body and sliding downwards through the internal cavities of her organs. The constant forage into the cavernous tunnels of Hatoum's anatomy ostensibly poses a "threat against the viewer's own sense of corporeal autonomy".<sup>11</sup> Resisting against being sucked in by the image amounts to resisting being assimilated into another being

Because its images are not resolutely insides or outsides, nor recognizably male or female for the most part, *Corps étranger* unmoors "the functional logic of the body",<sup>12</sup> blurring the boundaries between self and other. Organs and orifices are mistaken for other ones, thanks to the camera's ability to level them to their common forms, undifferentiated by touch or texture. Spell-bound by the visual forward movement, the viewer's body threatens to also be pulled out of control, aspired into the other body's tunnels. The camera in *Corps étranger* follows the same path as that of any foreign object entering the body, from outside to inside, and from mouth, through digestive system, to anus. We too as viewers are ingested and digested, and the looping of these images reproduces the cycles of existence in the daily repetition of intake and excretion.

Hatoum presents her body in sacrifice, as an offering open to exploration. But it does not let itself be freely consumed. The installation's circular screen witnesses the viewer's indiscretion, sometimes even showing Hatoum's closely filmed eye. It warns that such voyeurism cannot be gratuitous, and that the cost of invading another body is the threat of being invaded by one in return. We are all, and all have, "foreign bodies." Not only are our insides foreign to us, but so is the medical equipment that gives us access to physical exploration, and so is the body that lends itself to be explored. Hatoum's is a foreign body because it is not ours, but also because it is that





of a foreigner. Conversely, in accepting, as viewers, to be privy to her exploration, we also accept to be the foreign bodies that are invading her.

*Corps étranger* provokes a certain constructive alienation, revealing the unfixedness of bodily parameters, art object parameters, and ultimately, personal identity. Judging by critical responses to the work, it appears to be an effective "disordering practice." The installation's indirect stratagems of revelation share something with Wodiczko's referral to Brechtian interruption in his proposal for the production of "Immigrant Instruments"<sup>13</sup>; Meta-theatricality, combined with an alienation effect experienced through the body, function as tools divulging the constructions of narratives and identities. Via these devices, dynamism and vitality are seen to be the undercurrents beneath any spatio-temporally-contingent identity. Only constant change is of the essence. In *Corps étranger*, we are not faced with a single frontier nor a centre and periphery, but rather with multiple borderlands whose very liminalities are in continuous transgression. *Corps étranger* performs a variation on Édouard Glissant's "circular nomadism": By going "from periphery to periphery," it "makes every periphery into a centre," and "abolishes the very notion of centre and periphery".<sup>14</sup> Inside and outside are seen to be only conventionally separated. Spectators choose to enter the cylinder, and choose to enter the body of the foreigner. By staying there, spectators also choose to be alienated. But as they leave, they may become aware of their intolerance towards being rendered foreign themselves.

Hatoum's production provides a space in which the very concept of dwelling can take on a nomadic, and thus productively interruptive, form. Her non-teleological model of identity resembles the optimistic proposal for "nomadic becoming" elaborated by the feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti.<sup>15</sup> It also harkens to James Clifford's notion of "dwelling-in-travel",<sup>16</sup> which I reclaim here in the form of dwelling-as-travel, where "dwelling" connotes identity, and "travel" suggests becoming. For it is not within the binary construct of either travel / or dwelling that we can escape the trappings of static essentialization, but rather in an ongoing negotiation *between*—a negotiation that takes time, and that will perhaps never be satisfyingly conclusive, as it resists the very notion of ever being fixed. Of greater interest, perhaps, is not the final victory of identity, but the shapes and pressures of its contests, and most importantly, the very fact that these contests are allowed to exist.

#### Notes:

1 Krzysztof Wodiczko, "Designing for the City of Strangers" in *Critical Vehicles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 9.

2 Krzysztof Wodiczko and Bruce Robbins, "The Science of Strangers" in John Knechtel, ed. *Alphabet City no. 6: Open Cit.* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998), 142. Wodiczko describes xenology as "a field of knowledge which also connects with the field of experience."

3 Cf. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), 22. "Musealization" is a term that Huyssen borrows from Herman Lubbe, and which refers to the "expansive historicism of our contemporary culture". By counter-musealization, I mean to suggest that Hatoum's practice seeks to engage in a continual present through its performative "iteration," and resists being stifled by being in or of the past. Hatoum's works become at least partially dysfunctional outside of their present interaction with a spectator.

4 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997), 18.

5 Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2002), 4.

6 Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 34.

7 Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity" in Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, eds., *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 91.

8 Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, *op. cit.*, 9.

9 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 17.

10. Frances Morris, "Mona Hatoum" in *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Century* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1995), 103.

11. Dan Cameron, "Boundary Issues: The Displaced Self in Mona Hatoum's Work" in *Mona Hatoum* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 28.

12. Jessica Morgan, "The Poetics of Uncovering: Mona Hatoum In and Out of Perspective" in *Mona Hatoum* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 3.

13. Krzysztof Wodiczko, *loc. cit.*, 146.

14. Édouard Glissant, *op. cit.*, 29.

15. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

## After the Ball: Notes on Muntadas' "On Translation: Die Stadt"

Muntadas's series of interventions entitled "On Translation: Die Stadt" operate, as the author describes it, as a "a metaphorical observation" of three cities in the "new European territory", and the respective official celebrations of political identity which each has recently hosted: Graz, Cultural Capital of Europe 2003; Lille, 2004 Cultural Capital of Europe; and Forum Barcelona 2004. The project consists of three parts: a 40-minute video shot in each of the three cities; the presentation, i.e. a converted truck which displays videos in different locations throughout each of the cities; and the time and place of the presentations—Barcelona, September 13-25—Lille, October 1-26—and Graz, November 6-21 (all 2004). The videos follow the paths of three cabdrivers, one in each city, juxtaposed with "open visuals" and "comments of city specialists, including architects, planners, cultural and city officials". Muntadas writes that the project "deliberately refers to a recent past and attempts to emphasize elements of discourse and propaganda that prefigure the changes anticipated in cities in connection with upcoming events and celebrations. It hints at how cities sell themselves and how cultural strategies are used to disguise their intentions."

The "Capital of Europe" and "Forum" festivals are instruments of the elite—the planning professionals, corporations, politicians, media, and the like—whose concern is the representation and reinforcement of the official image(s) of the city. As areas where "licensed transgressions" (to use Terry Eagleton's phrase) may occur, they can be considered in the realm of the carnivalesque. But they are also a sophisticated and popular form of state-sponsored propaganda, much like the world expositions on which they are modeled.

Muntadas makes clear that aim of OT:DS is "to compare claims and promises [made during the festivities] with what was achieved in reality." In such a milieu as "Capital of Europe", this could prove to be a risky proposition, as any intervention into the discourse of the official celebrations has the chance of being drowned out, or more likely subsumed into the cultural and economic apparatus with which it seeks to engage. (One imagines something like a "Free Speech Zone" in these cities



*On Translation: Die Stadt* poster



during the celebrations, where figures such as Muntadas could "make their voices heard".)

To resist such an all-too-familiar operation (cf. Jameson), Muntadas borrows a page from none other Bakhtin. Recall that OT:DS occurs "after the ball", and "from a certain distance", i.e., not long after the conclusion or near the end of the official celebrations, and in the cities which hosted the festivals. "Chronotope"—understood by Muntadas as "context" ("where space and time overlap")—becomes central to a strategy of resistance. "The timing chosen for the presentation is deliberate (time-specific), making a point thereby not to reinforce the official political, institutional, and media-conveyed discourse, but rather to decode it, and refer what is said to what actually occurred, what we experienced and its consequences."

The "decoding" (translation) and "reference" operations cited above are key to understanding OT:DS as a calculated inver-

sion of official order, as the carnivalesque in the contemporary European city, or more precisely, into the aftermath of the "official" carnival of the city-state.

In as much as the Capital celebrations are obfuscations, masks which cover the political and economic operations which enact the official shaping of cities, OT:DS seeks to unmask these processes. This unmasking is one kind of translation. Another translation is the empowering of the city-dwellers themselves, the audience of OT:DS who view the comments of city specialists on video. Those who are normally the "objects" of the planning processes become the subjects, empowered to gaze upon the once-concealed processes now on display. Agency is, in effect, translated from one actor to another, and one location to another. A performance delivered on the wheels of a truck into the European city, OT:DS counters the state carnival with a new conception of the carnivalesque and—not least through its spatial and temporal strategy—resistance.





# Notes:

- 1 Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso Editions, 1981), 149 Also revealing is Eagleton's characterization, in the same passage, of carnival as "a thoroughly 'corporatist' culture, and thus in some danger of being undialectically *translated* into an image of the future." [my italics].
- 2 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968).
- 3 Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 49
- 4 Even as Bakhtin understood what he termed "chronotope" in a more-or-less strictly literary or narrative framework, his own writing is suggestive of its application in other disciplines: "The chronotope is where the knots of narrative are tied and untied .Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins." Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 250



Kelly Dobson

## Polymorphous Machine-Bodies



## Machines and Humans

Long before implants, splicing, and cyborgs, people and machines have lived as companion species, co-evolving. It is evident that machines are not neutral parties: We communicate through machines, we are frustrated by machines, we assign power to machines, we lay blame on machines, we cuddle up with machines, we wage war through machines, we invest hope in machines, we let our lives depend on machines, we are scared of machines. Incredibly influential are the elements of machines that we did not consciously design into them, such as the sounds they make, the vibrations, the movements and the gestures. Machines in our daily lives, often without ever being consciously acknowledged, influence self-conception, expression, social perception, and perception of responsibility or action. In the following projects, I have explored the potential for new relationships between humans and machines, relationships which undermine the presumed boundaries that distinguish humans from their machines, inverting to a certain degree their respective roles.

## Wearable Machine-Organs

Wearable Body Organs is a series of very visible, spectacular or carnivalesque even, play-use objects-devices-equipments that offer context sensitive functionality for their wearer and simultaneously announce their own need for existence by being used in public (without being hidden and small as is the trend with consumer gadgets and self-helping devices, hearing aids, PDAs, artificial organs, and colostomy bags. *ScreamBody*, *CryBody*, *SleepBody*, *EatBody*, *HoldBody*, *FightBody*, *HideBody*, *HouseBody*.) Rather than being hidden and made to go unnoticed, these "products" are designed to be noticed, as this is key in their functionality -- they are social-critical activists.

The wearable apparatuses function as transitional objects - they allow bridges between the person's internal experience and the outside world in situations in which the person would otherwise not be able to make that possible. Each apparatus acts to call attention to the social repression addressed by the very need for the existence of the device. Participants access sensorial energy that has been implicitly or explicitly put to sleep by enculturation.

**ScreamBody**, the first of this series, is a portable space for screaming. When a user needs to scream but is in any number of situations where it is just not permitted, *ScreamBody* silences the user's screams so that he or she may feel free to vocalize without fear of retaliation, and, at the same time, records the scream for later release where, when, and how the user chooses.



2\_ *Scream Body*

## Machine Therapy

Critical work happens in the connection between people and machines in the live action psychoanalytic sessions of *Machine Therapy*. The machines I use in this project have expressive and engaging behaviors, and their strength of character and neurotic propensities are foregrounded. As a machine therapist, I facilitate a communication and empathy between the machines and people. I set up the situation. The people and machines, finally becoming revealed to each other in their full polymorphisms, have a lot to say to each other and learn from each other and argue about and discover.





### 3\_ Stills from Machine Therapy Session

Exploring further the concept of human noise and machine noise, I began singing with large machines in public spaces, discovering that I could achieve resonance with the sounds of their motors. I wanted to access in a useful way all the noise pollution, to invert it. Rather than plug my ears and eyes and hide from it, I began singing with the monstrous machines in public spaces, city construction, demolition, and road work sites. Jack-hammers provided a safe place to scream, a sonic shelter. The motor sound was experienced then as inseparable from my own voice, like when singing in resonance with another person. I experienced a connection with these machines as if they were body extensions. Sometimes I felt that I was controlling the motors of these gigantic machines with my voice; sometimes I felt that they were pulling me along. They brought me through expressions physical and vocal that I would have found in no other way. This experimental balancing act and communication with the machines facilitated personal exploration, discovery, and development.

### Blendie

Blendie is an interactive, sensitive, intelligent, voice controlled blender with a mind of its own. Materials are a 1950's Osterizer blender altered with custom made hardware and software for sound analysis and motor control. People induce the blender to spin by speaking its language—by vocalizing the sounds of its motor in action. A person may growl low pitch blender-like sounds to get it to spin slowly, and the person can growl blender-style at higher pitches to encourage Blendie to speed up. Sometimes Blendie revs up with something to say of its own, rather than simply responding and empathizing.

An empathic opportunity is made manifest emphasizing and utilizing the aspects of blenders that have not been designed into them intentionally—i.e. their incredible sound and vibration—but that nevertheless have large roles in our interaction and approach to life with them.

## Architecture against Architecture: Disengaging the Metaphysical Alliance

In 1951, when Heidegger first gave the lecture "Bauen Wohnen Denken," the architects in the crowd, Hans Scharoun among them, could hardly restrain their enthusiasm.<sup>1</sup> And in 1971 when the text was translated into English and published, its success was a foregone conclusion. The excitement that it generated was predicated not only on the argument—and one cannot deny its lure even today—but also on a rather simple historical fact. This was the first time in over a century that a major philosopher had written directly on the subject of architecture, even though it was Heidegger's ambition to radically shift the discussion away from architecture to "*bauen*." In other words, the text that help found a disciplinary domain that came to be known as "architectural theory" was a text that demanded that one turn away from architecture and toward something altogether different. Post-Heideggerian theory was not about making architecture better, more meaningful, or more suited to the demands of modern life, but about not making architecture at all! Needless to say, once that particular philosophical challenge presented itself as a possibility, the alliance between architecture and its new philosophical patrons began to take on a life of its own with Peter Eisenman courting Jacques Derrida, and others courting Frederic Jameson or Gilles Deleuze.

Even though the sparkle of those alliances has waned in recent years—defeated in some sense by the very academe that it sought to reform as well as by a new generation of architectural technocrats and pragmatists—one has to remember the incontrovertible but rarely commented on fact that few philosophers of repute engaged with the discipline of architecture before Heidegger. And the reason is not too hard to establish. Transcendental metaphysics from the late eighteenth century onward had positioned poetry and music at the apex of aesthetic production, those being, so it was generally assumed, the most refined and immaterial of the arts, and thus the closest to the manifestation of the ideals to which society was obligated to aspire. The only major Enlightenment philosopher to have taken architecture relatively seriously was Georg Friedrich Hegel, for whom architecture belonged, however, primarily to the early Symbolic Age when mankind lacked the tools

for a more refined aesthetic articulation. The Symbolic Age stretched from the time of Egyptians (the pyramids are the example Hegel gives) into the Gothic age by which time architecture co-existed with sculpture as the leading form of artistic expression, and sculpture was soon to be replaced by painting and then by poetry.

Needless to say Hegel's argument forced architecture after the Gothic age to be split against itself. Architecture could no longer match the accomplishments of the higher arts, but nor could it relive the great glory days of the Middle Ages, and this despite the ambitions of latter-day medieval revivalists, for that would have been counter to the idea of dialectic progress. Architecture was in a philosophical double bind. It is my intent in this paper to insist, but also to invert, the legitimacy of this double bind.

Heidegger hoped, of course, to dispense with the problem once and for all by arguing that *bauen* had a history embedded not in the shallow protocols of civilization, but in an alternative metaphysics of language. Heidegger set out to prove this by showing that the word *bauen* goes back to *buen* and beyond that, in an even more distant time, to *bin*, as in *ich bin*, or "I am."<sup>2</sup> In making the link between Building and Being, one was to realize in what way *bauen* had not only developed through time, but had also been damaged by its eventual replacement, architecture, which had produced not places in which "one dwells," but rather an endless continuum of "housing," along with open stretches of highway and the "babble" of the radio.

The irony was that in seeking out language's hidden meanings, one encounters a onomatopoeiac word game in which *bauen* is linked to *buan* (notice the shift in syllables and missing e), which brings us to *bhu* (note the lopping off of a syllabic unit), which brings us to *beo* and then *bin*. In this way we arrive at the first words of creation, spoken not by God, but so it seems by a mythological Black Forest farmer stomping around on his newly-cleared field. Wife and children, and even the need for protection or clothing are not yet in the picture. Nonetheless

less, out of the luminosity of *bin*, there emerges a host of syllabic slips that create words like *Bauer* (farmer) and *Nachbar*, (neighbor) that in a magical way begin to create a linguistic-social web around Being's originary force.<sup>3</sup>

It is quite possible that surrealist poetry that was all the rage in the 1950s influenced Heidegger in this, for there is something, methodologically speaking, almost Dadaistic in the way words in being rubbed up against each other produce the illusion of a history far more profound than what can be actually proven etymologically. Being, Heidegger, admits, at the very beginning of *Being and Time*, undergoes a series of "distortions and overpaintings [*Übermalungen*]," that ultimately "trivializes" its presence.<sup>4</sup> In other words, as one moves from *ich bin* to *ich beo*, and thus away from Being and toward the potential for social life, one also moves toward the forgetfulness of language. To retrieve the lost ontic (or should one say iconic) moment, Heidegger argues that one needs a philosophy that works against the force of time. It is a philosophy of *destruktion* that "sees itself assigned the task of interpreting the foundation of ancient ontology in light of temporality."<sup>5</sup>

But as it turns out, architecture could not be so easily inverted, despite the *destruktion* that was meant to bring us into sight of a pure theoretical thought, if you will, without architecture. The word *destruktion*—a German spelling of a French word—was used to reveal the inadequacy of the German language to think against the grain of the Germanic *bin*. In other words, there is something purposefully foreign to the uncovering of truth. It requires an outsider's perspective, even though it is only a tactical necessity. But a *destruktion* can only happen if one knows the how to identify the interfering structure without by accident obliterating the underlying truth, an operation methodologically akin to architecture itself. Thus, in some sense there is something necessarily architectural in the uncovering to Being, with the irony being that the redeeming force of language—as it slips and slides its way into the present—turns out to be a slow-acting poison that dooms *bauen* at the very moment it becomes "historical." In other words, the very fiction that was meant to show that there was an alternative to architecture embeds within it—albeit unwittingly—the legitimacy of architecture itself. And even though it is only a temporary engagement, architecture, like a virus, has learned to survive in unfriendly conditions; it infects and ultimately undermines Being, entering the system unnoticed at the first linguistic break from *bin* to *bhu*.

The double bind of architecture in the nineteenth century has become a double negation in Heidegger. Architecture, though ostensibly that which has to be destroyed, had first to get rebuilt in a foreign etymology in order to set up the methodological alienation necessary for *bauen*. One comes to the awkward conclusion that architecture becomes yet again, precisely, ar-

chitecture at the very moment that its detachment from philosophy becomes in Heidegger its attachment to it.

All in all, the story of architecture is a strange and even a desperate one. From the early nineteenth century onward, architecture was seen philosophically as an archaic and limited form of consciousness that has been transcended by the other arts and allowed to exist in a type of perpetual death. Architecture lived a double life, either below or above the cultural horizon. And once abandoned by philosophy, architecture could all the more be locked out of the house to become the evidence for the pathology of modernity. And yet architecture, like a force of nature unto itself, managed to persevere as a double negation within the very body of *bauen*.

One can see how this still plays itself out in the works of Jean Nouvel which seek out an evocation of the modern sublime rising above the huddled vernaculars of the everyday. "The architect," he writes, "is always a receiver, an amplifier and a 'retransmitter.'" In order to create anything, he goes on to say, "you first have to feel emotion in your head, and then manage to reinterpret it with your maximum possible strength and in that way enable the whole world to experience it as well."<sup>6</sup> But the struggle to situate architecture only returns to the unsituatedness that was imposed so categorically on it by nineteenth century philosophers. In other words, Nouvel's architecture comes into itself as both a physical object announcing its autonomy from the other arts, and at the same time as a representation of the colonizing urge of the Enlightenment. It rises and sinks in the same breath. Nouvel's black buildings, literally expressing architecture's desire to speak through darkness of philosophical idealism become in the final analysis another affirmation of architecture's missing philosophical text.

Compared to Nouvel's equation between mission civilisatrice, Rem Koolhaas welcomes the absence of philosophy's engagement with Being to celebrate the new universal world of shopping and exchange. But that should not give us the confidence that architecture can repair that which is missing. Rather we should see architecture's historical force as that which in one way or another always compensates for the missing philosophical text. Nineteenth century historicism tried to overcome the problem by reviving architecture's philosophical-historical glory-days. Functionalism tried to overcome the problem by elevating architecture to the level of biology or economy. Professionalism, which gathered steam around the turn of the century, hoped to elevate architecture into the Enlightenment project of social reasoning. It was in the context of these types of developments—whether associated with contract law (Latrobe), history (William Morris), psychology (Robert Endel), industry (Walter Gropius), social philosophy (Hannes Meier), neo-historicism (Robert Stern), *mission civilisatrice* (Nouvel) etc.,—to paint with a broad brush—that architecture found a





explain the different fields of activities that these disciplines are said to define but do little more. Instead architecture—in a state of dialectical abandonment in philosophy—needs to be continually paired with architecture itself, as in the following equation: "architecture/architecture."

I am speaking diagrammatically. I am not saying what architecture should look like, or how an architect should start the design process. This equation is not a demand for a new type of architecture, but itself a description of architecture as it is (and as it is not) in the intersection between time and space. The duality of the words is thus not a dualism but points rather to various possible multiples, even to a mirroring of the term "architecture," and also to its potential repetition as well as the double location of its representation trajectory. And, because it is split against itself, the equation points to a repression of one word under the other, and to the struggle of the repressed against its master. Unlike the deforming energy of the translation from *bin* to *bauen* that left one at best with an ephemeral "poetics" with its pretences of science and rigor, a more properly "deforming translation," to use the words of Jacques Derrida, starts with and ends at a point where architecture can bring out of hiding the unclarity of its productive dialectic of impossibility.<sup>8</sup> In this way we can protest against the attempts to erase, forget, deny, if not overtly obliterate architecture's historical and theoretical unsituatedness in Enlightenment thought.

Naturally in the equation "architecture/architecture" there is a danger of it collapse into nothing. But if we cycle architecture into its intransitiveness then we are helping create a vicious circle or better yet, a tautology that opens up a space of uncertainty as to what is being represented by the word "architecture." The equation of how to operate in that was, of course, opened up by the Enlightenment. Once philosophy decided to give up its metaphysical alliance, it had to nonetheless thicken itself to both define and protect its newfound purpose. Kant asks how do we judge judging. Hegel makes it clear that it is not history that he is interested in but the history-of-history, and for that reason he challenged the falsity of certain historiographies to clear the way for a purer and more powerful form of historical presence. Similarly Nietzsche asks not what value is, but, What is "the value of value?" Heidegger asks, What is the being-of-being? This doubling—an architecture all its own—brings both criticism and its object into alignment and this is both strength and weakness of modern philosophy.

Would it not be right to integrate this architectural ideogram into architectural speculation, for it would allow us to see architecture's history as a signifier of philosophy's absence in the context of architecture's modernity? By the time August Pugin, for example, wrote *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture* (1843), architecture was already determined by what it could not do. It was already articulating its status as an outcast. And once detached from philosophical represen-

tation, and then attached by way of compensation to the representation of its failure (in the mode of historicism), architecture came to exist right up to our own day only in a dispersed way. The equation "architecture/architecture" keeps us from closing that gap again and from hardening us against the return to the singular.

My interest in these remarks is to reinvest critical discourse with something more than an appreciation of architecture's numerous disciplines, its technical masteries or design virtuosités. I want to challenge the notion that architecture can spatially define the needs of the present. Architecture can never escape from the negativity that gave it the set of disciplinary rules by which it came to have its history. I want to reestablish the primacy of that history to architecture, by which I mean, once again, not that architectural history (the discipline) holds the key to understanding architecture, but that architecture exists only by means of a historical function that is equivalent to its lack of philosophical and thus and historical relevance. Having been detached from philosophy's higher aims and having thus to situate itself as best it could within the framework of disciplinary structures and expectations, there was a moment when architecture wanted nothing more than to give itself over to historicism, to the call of professionalism, to the scientific protocols of the rationalists, to the diagrams of the engineers, to the ambitions of corporate ideologies, to the formalism of art historians and even to the phenomenology of Heideggerians. And yet that which we call architecture seems to always leak out beyond these limitations leaving it in that strange state of having never been truly alive and yet not ever being quite dead. It is in this context that we should seek both a theory and practice of architecture.

#### Notes:

- 1 The lecture was published in 1954 in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954). It was published in English as "Building Dwelling Thinking" in *Poetry Language Thought*, ed. J. Glenn Gray, trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper, 1971), 143-163. The absence of commas in the title of the lecture was intended to enforce the equivalence of the three.
- 2 See, Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1993), 348-9.
3. Ibid.
- 4 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), 2.
5. *Sein und Zeit*, 25.
6. Cristina Díaz Moreno and Efrén García, "A Conversation with Jean Nouvel," *El Croquis* 112-3 (2002), 10.
- 7 Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique Translated by Willis Domingo* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982), 43.
- 8 Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction. Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 230.

Natalie Jeremijenko

## The Bureau of Inverse Technology: Reversing Standards of Evidence



1\_ One Tree: Seedlings, saplings, and different leaves from a single tree.

Inverse technology might be defined as machinery used to interrogate the very nature of its own machinery. The diverse projects developed by the bureau of inverse technology (BIT)—which include robotic dogs, tree cloning, and an anti-terror hotline—all beg the obvious question: Why *inverse* technology? The easy way out might be to read the term "inverse technology" as a reference to a general subversive sensibility that pervades these projects. Yet there is something else—naggingly obvious but somehow hard to pinpoint—that unites these projects, something that might be best described as an endless re-invention of the methods of transmitting information. This recurring trope suggests that a more specific application of the term inverse may have been intended here, one that goes beyond general dissidence. While there may be something politically subversive in the thematic content broached by the BIT—content ranging from ecology to civil rights—there is perhaps something *inverse* in the projects' methods of interrogation and communication: Could there be here a methodology that turns inside-out our very conventions of knowing?

### Cultivating Evidence

In the "One Tree Project," a thousand trees cloned from the same source were raised in identical lab conditions and then transplanted to various public spaces in the San Francisco Bay area. At its most basic level, the point of the project is simply to observe what the trees' eventual variations reveal about their

specific environmental conditions: namely the micro-climates of the Bay area. Prior, however, to the trees' relocation from the lab to different outdoor locales, variations were already apparent in their growth patterns, variations which were presumably not linked to either environmental or genetic differentiation. With this discovery, an unanticipated space of inquiry opens up within the presumed dichotomy of genetic versus environmental determinism, revealing a third space of possible variability that undermines the potential for a clear, linear experiment. Although there has been a tendency among viewers of the project to read it as a scientific investigation of the "nature or nurture" question,<sup>1</sup> this is obviously not a scientific experiment in any usual sense of the term. Whereas the scientific method generally poses a hypothesis, tests this hypothesis through experimentation, and then draws specific conclusions, in the "One Tree Project" there is no hypothesis and no conclusions. The project releases scientific inquiry from the domain of the laboratory and renders it legible via the direct physical presence of the trees. Science is no longer relegated to the language of data circulated in academic publications; rather it is integrated into a larger network of learning and communicating.

In a way, the laboratory is turned on its head. Science, often regarded less as an epistemological method than as a body of disciplinary issues, here resuscitates its original proposition to serve as a method of observation and open-ended inquiry. Yet in the absence of a hypothesis, in the rejection of the sort of built-in teleological design that guides most scientific ex-





2\_ Feral Robots deployed at Cement Plant Park, Bronx, NY.

periments, what is also questioned here is the very method of scientific inquiry itself. That is to say, the scientific method is employed to interrogate scientific methods. It is inversion at its most elemental level. The project reveals early on—at the point where the seedlings grow into distinct forms in spite of identical environmental conditions and genetic makeup—that the questions seemingly posed by the experiment (“How does a tree’s particular environment affect its physical life?”) are not necessarily the questions generated by the experiment itself. The experiment is not designed to establish—to prove or disprove—an item of knowledge, so much as to reveal the very limitations of knowledge, and of our means of pursuing and disseminating knowledge. While the “One Tree Project” questions methods of scientific inquiry, it also expands the normal channels through which we communicate knowledge, providing new living forms of evidence.

### Toying with Evidence

The BIT’s ongoing Feral Robot project short-circuits standard paths of knowledge and communication through adapting robotic animals to serve as instruments of both data collection

and data display. Outside of this project, two principal use-markets have guided the development of robotic animals: The toy industry which currently markets robotic dogs, and the U.S. military which has been developing “robo-dogs,” humanoid drones, and a general menagerie of automatized beasts.<sup>2</sup> The Feral Robot project makes use of these developments,

“exploiting the markets of scale of the toy industry, specifically in the realm of entertainment robotics; the hardware distribution power of national and multinational corporations (and the cultural imperialism); to provide a readymade, inexpensive and highly distributed hardware platform. The robotic dogs currently on the international market provide the most inexpensive source of compatible motors, actuation, and sensing mechanisms available.”<sup>3</sup>

The BIT offers kits and instructions for upgrading one’s robotic dog in order to make it more “useful,” and encourages users of these kits to devise new applications for the technical components. The toy dog is thus converted from a useless high-tech novelty into an open-ended tool for learning. The Feral Robot website explains that.

“Each mod/design is accompanied by a detailed set of OPEN instructions. The hope is that these instructions will be modified and commented on by each user to create a more efficient set of steps. The design process is one that is open to proposals and changes from anyone participating in a modification. New designs are welcome and old designs are open to critique.”<sup>4</sup>

The proposed modifications re-outfit the dogs as instruments for gathering evidence about their environments. In one venture, a group of teenage students at the Bronx River Art Center equipped a pack of robotic dogs with sensors to detect volatile organic solvents and then deployed the dogs in the nearby Cement Plant Park. The path of the dogs is determined by the level of pollutants, so that the dogs seek out the areas of highest contamination, leading the students on a sort of pollution chase. Central to the project’s objectives is that the means for acquiring evidence is made available to anyone who wishes to engage in the project: They are not given evidence, but only a set of tools to aid in collecting it. By playing on two devices that are generally received passively—the toy robot, on the one hand, and scientific data, on the other—and giving people the tools to adapt these models, the BIT proposes a non-passive technology whereby people can develop their own devices for gathering data. What happens in the process is a certain collapse of the epistemic distance that typically exists between technological output and our own input. Moreover, within the machine itself, there is no real distance between the gathering of information and the display of such information. The dogs’ “sniffers” lead them towards the highest levels of contamination, so that the seeking of information is in fact the information itself: That is to say, the dogs chase after pollutants by way

of seeking "data", while simultaneously the chase itself renders legible that very data, since the motion of the dogs is what reveals the existence and intensity of contamination.

Authorizing Knowledge

If the aim of these projects is not so much to provide the public with knowledge, as to equip them with the means of acquiring knowledge, then what is being subverted ultimately is the relationship between knowledge and authority. This is not to say that there is no authority present in the formulation of such projects, but one might safely say that each project takes as its starting point the premise that knowledge can be revealed in ways that generate questions and interpretations, rather than attempting to silence questions by providing answers. Although there is clearly some didactic agenda embedded within these projects, the device that is engaged in each project—be it a circuit board and sensor kit or a telephone hotline—provides a framework for questioning, that might potentially segue-way into divergent paths. "Inverse technology" might mean many and varied things for each of the projects developed by the BIT, but at its most distilled level it could be defined simply as equipment for the potentially endless turnings, un-turnings, and re-turnings of question, answer, question.

Text written by Ginger Nolan based on presentation of work by Jeremijenko who works as an engineer for the bureau of inverse technology. One Tree Project was undertaken by Jeremijenko. The Feral Robots project was collaborative with students at the Bronx River Art Center, Yale University, Pratt Institute, and the Florida Film Festival.

Notes:


- 1. See. <http://www.quicktopic.com//21/H/wExXpZX887w2> for a public discussion of this project
- 2. Noah Schachtman, "Mobile Robots Take Baby Steps," Wired News, January 7, 2004
- 3. "Mission Statement" for BIT's Feral Robot Project <http://xdesign.ucsd.edu/feralrobots/projectindex.html>
- 4. BIT's Feral Robot Upgrade website: <http://xdesign.ucsd.edu/feralrobots/upgradeindex.html>.



3\_ The Anti-terror Hotline allows people to report any police action or harassment enacted in the name of "anti-terror" prevention. A website (<http://www.bureauil.org/anlitterror/>) provides transcripts as well as sound bytes of all phone messages received. Through this simple reversal of the methods of gathering evidence—policing those who police—a simple inversion of surveillance occurs.

PUBLIC DATABASE-BUREAUIT.ORG/ANTITERROR

ANTITERRORLINE

0000

US 1 212 998 3394

UK 0 207 987 0655

UPLOAD AN AUDIO REPORT

PRESS 1 FOR ANTITERROR

4\_ Feral Robots: "You may not be aware that OUT THERE, in happy family homes, in the offices of corporate executives, in toy stores through out the globe, is an army of robotic dogs. These semi-autonomous robotic creatures, though currently programmed to perform inane or entertaining tasks: begging for plastic bones; barking to the tune of national anthems; walking in circles; are actually fully motile and AWAITING FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS."

Anna Klingmann

## The Meaningless Popularity of Rem Koolhaas

Armstrong: "What question comes to mind, when you think of Marcel Duchamp?"

Conner: "The very idea of questioning."

If Rem Koolhaas hadn't come along, we would have needed to invent him. This article poses a critical investigation into the position of conceptual art in the Warhol sixties and its poignant repercussions for the architectural discourse in the Koolhaas nineties. Just like the art scene in the mid-sixties, the architectural world in the mid-eighties was ready for that revolution, and fortunately for Rem, he was the one who wiggled everybody else out. I may be giving him too much credit, but like Duchamp and Warhol before him, he discovered quite a bit just through his investigation into things. Had he not existed, chances are that someone sooner or later would have discovered many of the things he did. One of his most significant contributions was that he rediscovered the inherent complexity in everyday scenarios, and proved that you could make architecture out of them. Like Warhol and Duchamp, he found a new sense of freedom in the opportunistic quality of things generally considered banal or mainstream. Koolhaas was actually the first critical architect who reinvented the commodity status of architecture. According to Koolhaas, "What those art movements of the sixties had in common is that they found, in things that are generally considered banal, simple or simplistic, reasons to assume that the sublime was there." With this premise in mind, he repositioned architecture within the framework of the commodity fetish. In this regard, Koolhaas' work is not only deeply influenced by the aesthetics of Warhol, Beuys and the Fluxus Movement but moreover inspired by their "heightened sense of identifying the sublime in the contemporary."<sup>1</sup>

While Duchamp challenged the status of the unique art object, Warhol denied the significance of its authorship. Rather than maintaining a separate status of art and defending it against impending processes of commodification, Warhol developed numerous strategies by which he transformed his work from

its inception into the absolute commodity.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, Warhol's work was an extension of Duchamp's destabilization of high art, in that it dealt with the manufacturing and distribution of art as any other commodity object. Ultimately, his work obeyed the same principles that determine the products of the cultural industry at large.<sup>3</sup> Those principles—commodity status, advertising, and fashion—had been traditionally believed to be profoundly heteronomous to the strategies of negation and critical resistance on which modernist artistic practice had insisted. In short, the obvious contradictions between mass-cultural and high-cultural production and the need to incorporate these contradictions within the aesthetic construct itself had been a great motivation for the conceptual art movement in the sixties. In this sense, a sort of covert inversion occurs whereby the adoption of the techniques and language of popular culture becomes not so much a pure affirmation of such culture, but rather a sneaky reversal of the respective statuses attributed to high- versus pop culture.

If we compare Duchamp's achievement to reconcile the mass-cultural and the high-cultural object on a conceptual level to Warhol's incorporation of art into business ("Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art"), we could say that Rem has done a bit of both. At a time, when critical architecture was still very much in fashion, Koolhaas ventured out of this schism—discarding the ideological baggage of modernist utopia—to surf on the commodified side of Manhattanism. Koolhaas' work superseded the role of architecture as a critical tool of modernist thought by taking a close look at the delights of commercially successful architecture. By reconsidering the split between "accommodating commercial" and "critical avant-garde architecture," he came up with a subversive mixture of both, which by Alejandro Zaera-Polo was termed the "accommodating critical." Koolhaas' intention here is not primarily to comply with the commodity fetishism of the consumer, but, just like Pop art, to irritate and experiment with the consumer's own compliance. By treating architecture in a quasi-simplistic manner, he reverted popular preconceptions that elevated the symbolic status of architects and imbued their works with artistic aura and the *sine qua non* of originality. Like Pop artists,



he plays on the keynotes of a post-industrial consumer culture while at the same time subverting its structures and intentions. In this way, his projects exude certain directness while simultaneously raising a different kind of awareness of the people experiencing it.

I would argue that much of Rem's intensity derives from this very suspension between critical avant-garde and commercial architecture. Flirting with both sides, he continues to destabilize the status quo between them. I'd say that it is this very questioning more than any thing else, which, as the overriding characteristic of his work, represents him and his role in architecture. It is the precision, with which he—more than any other architect of his generation—investigates the positioning of architecture within popular culture that has fundamentally changed many of the ideological and aesthetic representations of the architectural avant-garde.

## CHEAPNESS

A utilitarian polemic of cheapness runs through much of OMA's work, recalling Warhol's complicity with mass production and commercial design. It also recaptures the use of inexpensive materials, as a quotation of the ordinary. Indeed almost all of OMA's projects articulate a keen engagement of mass-manufactured materials as well as the incorporation of "cheap" detailing, which closely corresponds to the annexation of normative consumer design into the realm of Pop art. The Kunsthal was perhaps the first radical example of cheapness: a subverted reiteration of the Neue Staatsgalerie in Berlin, the museum's playful array of innovative cladding materials in conjunction with new spatial complexities ironically recall Mies van der Rohe's perfectionist reductionism intimately tied to a restrained expression in material and form. Whereas Mies' Neue Staatsgalerie reads as a self-contained platonic object detached from the urban context surrounding it, the Kunsthal reveals a fragmented collision of parts, highly charged by the schizophrenic qualities of its site. Pedestrian and vehicular infrastructures break the ideal nature of its square, incessantly undermining its formal geometry. While the Neue Staatsgalerie hovers on a solid podium of limestone, the front facade of the Kunsthal punches through a transparent plane of meshed metal plates, exposing the infrastructure right below it. The interior spaces are formed by the exaggeration of "basics" more commonly found in parking garages: bare concrete floors and columns discharge a climate of alienating neutrality, set off by the bright color patches of temporary furniture and fluorescent tubing. Over-scaled signage guides you to the nearest exit, while the exit itself constitutes a sign.

At first glimpse, the Kunsthal's four sides seem equally approachable. However, as opposed to Mies' building, where all four elevations form a consistent envelope, the Kunsthal's



1\_Kunsthal, OMA

facades are each carefully differentiated by a distinguished sensibility. According to Cynthia Davidson, the Kunsthal "no longer seems like a static box but rather like a series of images that play back in the mind"<sup>4</sup>. This capturing of "experiential time" as opposed to "linear time" recoups the idea of simultaneity in Pop art, whereby artists, inspired by mass media no longer provided a narrative sequence, but momentarily dislocate the viewer with familiar information in an unfamiliar setting. In a similar fashion, the Kunsthal's four facades each seem to freeze a singular experience in space, resisting their reunion: Whereas the west facade is cut in half by the use of painted concrete below and semi-opaque glass above, the east facade does the exact reverse. The north facade exudes the most traditional appeal with a combination of travertine and glass, while the front with its row of surreal column types strikes as the most bizarre.<sup>5</sup> Overall, one cannot escape the sense of "cheap" detailing, which is particularly noticeable at the corners, where the thinness of the cladding is clearly exposed. This fragmented quality of "pieces having been snapped together"<sup>6</sup> exudes an aura of ephemerality, which recaptures Warhol's sense of the impermanent.<sup>7</sup>

As a polemical exercise of financial economy, the use of cheap construction materials is perhaps most obvious in the Con-



2\_Kunsthall, OMA.

grexpo: the explicit use of low-grade concrete and corrugated plastic authenticates the building's blurred position between cultural and commercial use. Programmatically, the building articulates a contemporary hybrid initially conceived as a trans-regional cultural institution incorporating concert hall, conference center and exhibition halls, the Congrexpo has been increasingly adopted for large-scale commercial events. Its low-budget architecture is however not to be confused with the sophisticated attitude of a "new simplicity." With its trite and, at the same time, grossly over-scaled proportions, the building more accurately acquires the unpretentious appeal of a suburban warehouse. Analogous to many pieces of Pop art, the Congrexpo constitutes a direct reflection of its suburban psychology. With infrastructure passing over, under, and around the building—softening its harsh glamour to the degree of formlessness, its non-descript supplication is rendered an actual simulacrum of the no-man's-land within which it is situated. This subverted reiteration of mainstream mediocrity is more over enhanced by the extensive use of low-cost materials. Layers of corrugated plastic define exterior and interior at once. No superfluous detail ever conceals the meeting of two panels, leaving no second thought about their prefabricated nature. Masses of meshed metal, this time in vertical position, wrap around colossal steel staircases. This ersatz mentality, exuding an alienating sense of familiarity is carried into the interior of the building with the extensive use of imitation leather and glossy surfaces to simply recoup... the average.

## UGLY

### Suspension of Judgment

Duchamp once said, "You have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymades is always based on indifference, and at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste."<sup>8</sup> With this rather apathetic attitude, Duchamp insinuated a questioning of traditional ideologies, which in turn granted him a fresh exposure to a whole series of contemporary phenomena. It also implied a willful distancing from the aesthetics of "the retinal in art," which served as a source of liberation to many of his contemporaries. It was through Duchamp's introduction of a quasi-arbitrary attitude towards conventional aesthetics that decisions in art shifted from preconceived visions and notions of representation to the process of making. Duchamp's attitude in many ways coincides with Koolhaas' deliberate suspension of aesthetic judgment, which entails an intentional "stepping back" from ideological preconceptions and stylistic notions in architecture. While Duchamp consciously withdrew from art as a discipline, Koolhaas removed himself from the traditional role of an architect. It is precisely this act of withdrawal, that granted both the necessary freedom for a fundamental rethinking of their disciplines, paving the way for subsequent redefinitions in terms of performative aims.

### Deformation

Another important link to understand Koolhaas' architecture is his latent infatuation with the debased, which implies to a certain extent a reconstitution of the marginal. For Aristotle, the beautiful object is one which has the ideal structure of an object; it has the form of a totality. One could argue that Villa Savoye is such a work of beauty. Its form is clear and distinct. Internally it exhibits coherence; externally it establishes a sharp boundary between itself and the world. According to the British psychologist and philosopher Mark Cousins, "This stress upon the object's being perfect and therefore finished already suggests a philosophical criterion as to what will function as ugly: it is that which prevents a work's completion, or deforms a totality—whatever resists the whole."<sup>9</sup> If one argues, that Villa Savoye reads as a self-contained object in material and form, the Kunsthall represents a fractured topography that juxtaposes spatial difference with programmatic indeterminacy. It resists the subordination of its spatial and material constituents to an ideal configuration, insinuating a willful deconstructing of space. In Alejandro Zaera-Polo's words: "OMA's projects constitute *bodies* rather than *objects*."<sup>10</sup> No more ideal forms, but instead their deformations. As such they are no longer governed by measures of proportion, which were perhaps the basic instrument of classical modernity, but rather constitute deformed entities of topological relationships, of connections,

adjacencies or distances."<sup>11</sup> Permitting densifications in some areas, dissolution in others, both schemes constitute disorganized bodies rather than the structured compositions of parts as occurred in classical or modern architecture.<sup>12</sup>

**Contamination**

In many ways, the notion of the ugly is also closely linked to the concept of contamination. To quote Cousins: "Contamination, at a logical level, is the process whereby the inside of an object demonstrates that it is larger than its outside or representation. The ugly object is voracious and, through contamination will consume the entire zone."<sup>13</sup> If one argues that the modernist object strove for a cohesive state of formal integrity and self-sufficiency, furthermore enhanced by its conscious detachment from context and site, one could say that OMA's works are the contaminated works of context. Extending into their respective surroundings, they form unstable infrastructures that mercilessly draw in local milieus and ambiances. The urban context is no longer merely "accommodated" but moreover interiorized and digested. The Congrexpo, in this regard, no longer constitutes a piece of architecture in the modern understanding but simply becomes a gigantic piece of "generic equipment" that absorbs the urban condition in order to recreate it—but *inside* rather than outside.<sup>14</sup> As such, it is not only infected by the condition of its surroundings but literally becomes a virus in itself.

More often, however, Koolhaas' work also contaminates. His urban intervention in Yokohama proposes a "flooding" of adjacent sites with "programmatic lava."<sup>15</sup> Without architectural pretensions, layers of public activity are programmed on a 24-hour basis to incite a maximum of public events with a "minimum of permanent definition." According to Koolhaas, the question simply became how one might occupy the largest possible territory with the least amount of architectural substance. His project for the Illinois Institute of Technology campus in Chicago proposes a synthesis of both concepts: the "interiorization of urban congestion" (to be contaminated), and "the reurbanization of the largest possible area with the least amount of built substance" (to contaminate). In order to establish an "instant" metropolitan condition in a derelict area of Chicago, OMA devised a large building that contains the density of an urban situation while at the same time covering substantial ground. The result is a gigantic one-story city, that—rather than merely stacking an architectural program—chooses to consume the entire site.

**The Grotesque and the Incoherent**

Assumption: "The genius may incorporate alien objects into a structure of a work, elements that would defeat a lesser artist,

in whose hands the whole would break into a collection of incompatible fragments."<sup>16</sup> "This account of genius," according to Cousins,

"introduces a permanent instability into subsequent discussions of beauty and ugliness. A dialectic between the two is now played out through the issue of the coherence of the totality. Ugliness can deform a work, but it can also strengthen it. For the stronger the totality of a work of art, the more it has to overcome those elements within itself that oppose its unification."<sup>17</sup>

This argument clearly poses a threat to form as a homogeneous entity. Koolhaas, as we know, incessantly experiments with the simultaneity of different movements and the juxtaposition of spaces, which perpetually undermines the validity of the uniform.<sup>18</sup>

In this regard, I would like to compare Le Corbusier's *promenade architecturale* to the role of infrastructure in Koolhaas' architecture. While the *promenade architecturale* presupposes a relationship of coherence to the form it engages, the opposite is true for OMA's buildings: form and circulation are almost always disjointed. I'm referring to a review of the Kunsthall by Kenneth Frampton, as interpreted by Cynthia Davidson,<sup>19</sup> who suggests that the Kunsthall poses an interesting parallel to Le Corbusier's Congress Hall for Strasbourg, most notably because in both projects infrastructure plays a vital role.<sup>20</sup> While at Strasbourg, a vehicular ramp passes around the building to the rooftop; the Kunsthall inhabits a series of pedestrian ramps, moving its visitors *through* the building to the roof. However, while in Le Corbusier's building, the ramp envelops and shapes the form of the building, the Kunsthall's ramp is conceived as a void that slices through the mass of the building. Whereas Le Corbusier's building reads as a synchronous expression of circulation and form, the Kunsthall's volume imparts a contested territory of cuts where form and movement as disjunctive elements enter into a dynamic process of negotiation. Again, I'm taking up Cynthia Davidson's argument, where she writes: "The box contains the spiral, compressing and deforming it while also being fragmented by it. The spiraling ramps of the Kunsthall move away from Le Corbusier's prescriptive circulation systems as form-making to symbolize instead the movement of architecture from actual spiral to a spiraling effect."<sup>21</sup> While Le Corbusier, or also Mies for that matter established a linear coherence between movement and form, which resulted in a spatial homogeneity; Koolhaas instigates an unstable relationship between the two, where coherence is born from the contested space between the subjective experience of the user and the neutral container of the form. This juxtaposition of space and movement is also reiterated in the Sea Terminal in Zeebrugge and the IIT Building, where Koolhaas orchestrates multiplicitous overlaps of different speeds and spaces. This "elimination of linear temporalities in favor of experiences of





3\_Congrexpo Center, OMA

simultaneity and indetermination,"<sup>22</sup> questions the modernist concept of the uniform and introduces another kind of equilibrium. By no longer accepting the existence of an objective logic, reality becomes the construction of desire.

## ORIGINALITY

### Objet Trouvée

Warhol banished the mysteries of artistic creation from his factory, where making a painting had roughly the same number of steps as a cake mix, and selling one involved "Small, Medium or Large. And how many?"<sup>23</sup> Koolhaas' rejection of any skill-oriented mode of artistic production, as well as his disdain for any notion of authenticity reveal similar ways of working at OMA. Most obviously, this attitude is demonstrated in the categorization of OMA's projects in *S,M,L,XL*, a book, which—unlike Warhol's paintings—categorizes architectural projects by size, subverting an inherently cultural venture to accede the commercial.

But also the depersonalized approach of Warhol's Factory along with its semi-automated mode of production imparts certain analogies at OMA. Warhol's comment "Pop comes from the outside" suggests that making art is a collaborative, not an isolated process.<sup>24</sup> His emphasis on the collective operation eradicated any concept of specialization. At the same time, Warhol's complete displacement of creative control opened

up the creative process to his co-workers where "collaborative craftsmanship gradually inverted the dependence on the individual designs of an artist-genius."<sup>25</sup> OMA, initially founded as a collaborative, likewise deflates notions of individual authorship. Furthermore, its architecture is less animated by the creative act itself but largely energized by the ever-shifting conditions of the contemporary city. Removing the notion of "taste" from their projects, OMA's architecture becomes a compliant entity that is subjected to the impact of existing restrictions. Economic or regulatory constraints in this regard are no longer viewed as an impediment to artistic invention but on the contrary present essential information. In fact, the entire urban territory is rendered an *objet trouvée*, which through a series of reinterpretations becomes the "readymade of architecture." By the same token, Warhol manipulated found materials that he happened to come across. The found image served as a template for a succession of mechanized processes entailing the systematic depersonalization of manual execution, whereby "drawing as the innermost mark of artistic authenticity, as a gesture of expression is replaced by a concept of artlessness."<sup>26</sup> More importantly, Warhol's work seemed to prove that these mechanized modes of production did not constitute a menace to the essential creativeness of an artwork, but simply elevated its cultural potential for mass consumption. For similar reasons, OMA propagates modes of architectural "deskilling," which constituted a vital source of inspiration for conceptual art. Just as Warhol used "anonymous processing" to obliterate the distinction between an original and its reproduction, OMA conceives of architecture no longer as a materialization of a prefixed vision but rather as a series of detached readings of contextual conditions. By quantifying operative data such as traffic flow, zoning, and land utilization, forms are no longer "designed" but rather "emerge." The ideological background to this mode of working, as was the case with Pop art, is intimately tied to the rejection of a prescriptive aesthetic discourse.

### The Generic

Accordingly, OMA distills the parameters of each scheme down to its most generic condition in an effort to liberate the proposal from prevailing ideologies. "After all what is a university library but a surface, on which to locate books and computers and a path, to bring the public to them? What is an opera house but a facility for the company to manufacture performances and a place for the public to assemble and watch them?"<sup>27</sup>

For Koolhaas, the banal constitutes a neutral basis from which to ignite his subversive strategy of difference. The most specific condition is distilled from the most generic to the point where the most common is defined anew, and the fundamentally unoriginal turns into something inherently original.<sup>28</sup> This interplay between the generic and the specific vividly recoups

Duchamp's game of originality and reproducibility. While for Walter Benjamin the original was marked by a sense of uniqueness, which was corrupted by methods of mechanical reproduction, Duchamp's readymades oscillate between both by turning previous distinctions inside out.<sup>29</sup> With the conception of the readymade, Duchamp undercuts the notion of the original by reproducing it as a kind of series. He then proceeds to subvert the "reproduction" by designating it as an "original." The terms are played off against each other to the point where neither one is privileged.<sup>30</sup> This attitude of ironic affirmation correlates with Koolhaas' critical transformation of the generic to yield something highly original. In his design for the Très Grande Bibliothèque de France in Paris, for instance, he uses the book stacks as a non-descript mass of "passive information," in which the reading rooms, as carefully carved-out voids, articulate the specific areas of "active information" by means of their diverse geometries. His project for the Universal Headquarters in Los Angeles presents another interesting redefinition of what is essentially deemed to be reproducible=generic in nature and what is irreproducible=specific. Again, a reciprocity is staged between the simple stacking of "generic floors" and the formal differentiation of "specific functions." Whereas the generic office floors remain essentially undesignated, they offer a convenient backdrop for selected, spatially differentiated volumes that display functions designated as specific. In this regard Rem's game is at once playful and subversive. While the generic allegedly legitimizes the specific, the commonplace is elevated as a singular event that points to a new definition of the authentic.

The generic is, however, also inseparably tied to the formal language of modernism. While Warhol plundered the legacies of modernism for product styling and propaganda, Koolhaas reused its formal vocabulary as a kind of architectural prototype. This perhaps also explains Rem's long lasting affair with Manhattanism—a commodified version of modernism—where the distinction of an original and its reproducible sign language has been eradicated.<sup>31</sup> With his cunning reproductions of modernism, visible for example in the Kunsthal (where he uses Mies' Neue Staatsgalerie as a prototype), Koolhaas twists and subverts modern principles both in organization and form to the point where the initially inauthentic reproduction acquires new definitions of authenticity. This positioning between original and reproduced modernism is not acted out in a purist fashion as perhaps in new minimalism and postmodernism, but on the contrary remains rather blurred. By suspending any kind of ideological position, Rem in fact succeeds to revert these positions. With each inflection that renders the so-called authentic inauthentic and vice versa, he produces hybrids that belong to neither side but instead incorporate elements of both. In closing, I would say that Rem's work is not a negation of modernism, like perhaps postmodernism attempted, but rather a neutralization, an almost ironic affirmation of modernism.

## Authorship

Rem's strategies of subversion ultimately point to the negation of architecture as the opus of an author. This final eradication of the original, as the unique production of the artist/architect was earlier signaled by Warhol who went as far as faking his own signature, as the traditional guarantee of authorship.<sup>32</sup> Here Roland Barthes' argument of the "absentee author" comes into play: "The absence of the author is not only a historical fact of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text (or—which is the same thing—the text is henceforth written and read in such a way that in it, on every level, the author absents himself)."<sup>33</sup> Barthes' notions are picked up more recently in Koolhaas' statements on Bigness: "Bigness is impersonal: the architect is no longer condemned to stardom. Giving up control is the premise. Bigness surrenders the field to after architecture."<sup>34</sup> Koolhaas continues this argument in his essay on the "typical plan," by acclaiming the absentee authors of commercial architecture as an "avant-garde of erasers,"<sup>35</sup> which promised architecture a kind of post-heroic status. This opens up a new vantage point on the indeterminacy of commercial architecture – reiterating Pop art's infatuation with mass media as the origin of complete indistinction or freedom.

The liberation of architecture from individual authorships is naturally accelerated by new technologies: "The elevator—with its potential to establish mechanical rather than architectural connections render null and void the classical repertoire of architecture. The art of architecture is useless in Bigness."<sup>36</sup> This deconstructing of the architectural vocabulary is expressed in many of OMA's projects. The Piranesian space of Lille or the House in Bordeaux renders a spatial perception quite different from classical modernism due to their extensive implementation of different technologies. This infiltration of new technologies into architecture is paralleled by the concept of mechanical reproduction in art, which, according to Benjamin was the end of art, as we knew it. While the unique status of art and architecture was always linked to a notion of implicit permanence, the mechanical as essentially reproducible accelerates a state of the ephemeral.<sup>37</sup>

## POPULAR

Ultimately the question arises: Why is Rem so popular? I would speculate that for our generation of architects he has had the same liberating influence as Duchamp and later Warhol had for the art scene. Interestingly enough, Koolhaas shares the same infatuation for American inventions, as many of the Pop artists in the sixties, for whom the commodification of mainstream America—at once impermanent, impersonal, and materialistic—correlated with more idealistic notions of pragmatic survivalhood and freedom. Koolhaas' architecture, in many ways, accurately reflects and embraces this unique combination of

pragmatism and ephemerality, without necessarily submitting wholeheartedly to its commodification. At the same time, however, his architecture exudes an opportunistic, almost apolitical quality, which for many of us has been a freeing influence from the moral allegations of recent critical practice

With that in mind, Rem is as detached from the dogmatic ideologically coded constructs of "supposed" avant-gardes as Duchamp and Warhol were before him, which ultimately enabled him to open up a vast array of possibilities for the architectural discipline to extend itself toward more performative goals. About his Zurich airport project Koolhaas comments: "I think our work is increasingly connecting and addressing the issue of performance rather than the issue of form; it is more interested in what actually happens in the utility, than the notion that in these unstable conditions you can still create something beautiful." In this sense, Rem's architecture also negates architecture as a visual phenomenon offered to the viewer: "This is the theme of the end of aesthetics, of the refusal of the judgment of taste, of the rejection of formalism, of the exclusion of architecture from every practice grounded on a morphological basis."<sup>38</sup> No longer bound by a prefixed aesthetic, OMA's projects evolve more likely from a goal-oriented strategy. With this approach based on the performative, OMA makes a first effort to reconcile the lingering schism between architecture and the public by raising the critical potential of addressing a non-specialized audience. By posing a general condition of eventuality first, OMA inserts itself into the cultural divide of mass culture and critical practice.

## Notes:

1 "Interview with Elisabeth Armstrong and Bruce Conner about the Work of Marcel Duchamp," in *The Duchamp Effect*, ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, Cambridge MIT Press, 1996), 57

2 Interview with Frances Hsu, 1997

3 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "The Andy Warhol Line," in *The Work of Andy Warhol*, ed. Gary Garrels, (New York: Dia Foundation, 1989), 65.

4 Buchloh, 65

5 Cynthia Davidson, "Koolhaas and the Kunsthal: History Lessons," in *Any 21: How the Critic Sees*, (New York: 1997), 39

6 *ibid*, 39

7 Davidson, 40.

8 I'm referring here to Warhol's paintings of soup cans with torn labels, of opened cans or the rows of Coca-Cola bottles whose contents range from full to empty

9 Pierre Cabanne, "Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp," trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking, 1971), as quoted by Thierry de Duve in "Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism," in *The Duchamp Effect*, 104

10 Mark Cousins, "The Ugly," in *AA Files* 28, (London: 1994, 61).

11 Alejandro Zaera-Polo, "OMA 1986-1991: Notes for a Topographical Survey," in *El Croquis* 53 (Madrid: 1994), 40.

12 *Ibid*, 42.

13 *Ibid*, 40

14 Mark Cousins, 63

15 Rem Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1995, 1204

16 *Ibid*., 1211

17 Mark Cousins, 61

18 Alejandro Zaera-Polo, 40.

19 Davidson, 40.

20 *Ibid*, 40.

21 *Ibid*, 40

22 Alejandro Zaera-Polo

23 Trevor Fairbrother, "Skulls," in *The Work of Andy Warhol*, 96

24 Nan Rosenthal, "Let us now praise famous Men," in *The Work of Andy Warhol*, 42.

25 Rainer Crone, "Form and Ideology," in *The Work of Andy Warhol*, 80

26 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "The Andy Warhol Line" in *The Work of Andy Warhol*, 54

27 Jeffrey Kipnis, "Recent Koolhaas," in *El Croquis* 79 (Madrid: 1996), 30

28 See also Anna Klingmann, Philipp Oswald, "Formlosigkeit," in *Arch + 30* (Berlin: 1997).

29 See Walter Benjamin, "The Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (New York: Random House, 1988)

30 Sarat Maharaj, "A Monster of Veracity, a Crystalline Transubstantiation: Typotranslating the Green Box," in *The Duchamp Effect*, 66.

31 See also Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1994)

32 Crone, 79

33 Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977)

34 Rem Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL*, 516

35 *Ibid*, 343.

36 *Ibid*, 500

37 See Benjamin, "The Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

38 See also: Thierry De Duve "Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism," in *The Duchamp Effect*, 119



Krzysztof Wodiczko and Ginger Nolan

## Disruptive Agency: A Conversation with Krzysztof Wodiczko

Krzysztof Wodiczko is a professor in the Visual Arts Program at the Department of Architecture and director of the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT. He is renowned for his large-scale slide and video projections on architectural facades and monuments. Since the late eighties, he has developed a series of nomadic instruments for both homeless and immigrant operators that function as implements for survival, communication, empowerment, and healing.

KW: You know, sometimes it takes being useful to make oneself an artist. In my case the usefulness of the kind of art I do for others lies in helping them in their own lives to become themselves useful artists, who then help others to take advantage in turn. I hope to be useful to you and the Thresholds as well.

GN: One of the principal ways that your work fits into the theme of this issue of Thresholds is how it deals with reversing roles of power. For example, that's true with some of your prosthetics, but also with....

KW: The projections.

GN: ...the projections, where you have a speaker who's suddenly empowered in such a way that he or she normally wouldn't be.

KW: Well, I have to really read again the very text that I offered you to read to see the relations between your questions and Bakhtin's ideas. So whether it's Bakhtin or not, there definitely is some play with the authority—the prestige—of historic monuments and facades in my projections. But also in the instrumentations there is some play with the humanoid cyborg and the empowered person versus the weak person, speechless and intimidated, marginalized. With monuments you have those people who are in fact monuments to their own trauma, they have become silent monuments. They've become large civic structures that are witnesses to events and they remember things, they see a larger perspective of a particular experience or a larger urban scale as if they were looking at their own experience from the height of the monument. Then they are sure to feel more powerful, but also they might establish

a certain distance, a tragi-comical distance from their own experience. So that way the seriousness of themselves as living monuments to their trauma is challenged as well. It's not that they will take it lightly, but they will have a distance that's required for critical process, for thinking through, for memory work. Because the memory work is a critical analysis of what has happened and why and under what circumstances, and what is the relation between what happened to me and to others, and what is the meaning of it and what should be done so it will not happen again—these are some elements of what one should call memory. Memory is also an act of storytelling. Memory is an act of speech. Memory is an intervention. Memory is a disruption of a repetition...a warning, a memento. So you can call it inversion, but there is of course more than inversion happening here. It's not simply that the weakest becomes the most powerful and the least legitimate becomes the most legitimate. There is also the process of gaining a new perspective, of helping oneself to confront all of those of which one doesn't want to speak. So it's an animation process. The silent person animating the monument must animate herself or himself in the first place.

And on the sides of the spectators, they witness this kind of anonymous experience, the inconvenient experiences that one doesn't want to hear, that are strangely familiar and might actually provoke inconvenient thoughts about oneself, various hidden and repressed experiences. This can be confronted through the artifice. The very important issue is the presence and use of an artifice, of something in-between, which is partially real and partially fantasy. So one can use this artifice comically and convey things that normally will not be easily transmittable, and also one can accept or just recognize and take, listen and hear, something fearful and difficult because it is partially real and partially fictitious. That is perhaps what Bakhtin saw some aspect of in carnival, in those puppets, the enlarged figures, the mockery that peasants could make out of authorities. At the same time they could speak of their experiences with authority. I don't know that I can point to any particular fragment of Bakhtin's writings here, but I have a sense that humor—not irony, but humor—is an important technique.

GN: Do you see humor in your work?

KW: I hope so. The lack of a sense of humor could be a serious psychological symptom, from a clinical point of view. Lack of humor is lack of distance, lack of a larger perspective, lack of metaphor, and lack of ability to symbolize, to produce symbols. So that means humor—good humor—is healing, is a sign of health. If someone who is traumatized and is incapable of seeing oneself and recognizing one's own emotions and experiences, it's a serious person, a deadly serious monument. A frozen monument. It's a frozen situation because horrible experiences shattered the person's faith in his or her own ability to move forward or face difficulties again in life. Now, the step of unfreezing—because it's a freezing of the failure situation, in trauma—requires some metaphorical, some other relation to oneself and one's own experience. The healthy moment is when people start cracking jokes, when they start laughing. And they start making a mockery of the very perpetrators who caused the pain, seeing that after all they are not that powerful but, "look how funny they are, or crazy, or out their mind!" It's just to see the world from a different perspective, as from a helicopter ride, you see the same place where things happened to you, but so differently. It's not necessary that you laugh, but you have to see it from a different angle. Anyway, the monuments...speaking monuments, this large scale, is comical by principle. If the homeless person who normally lives under the shadow of this monument, crawling somewhere in the cracks of this huge monument, suddenly becomes a monument himself or herself, it's comical.

GN: It reminds me, too, to bring back Bakhtin, of the idea of the grotesque body and something that is inflated to being larger-than-life. Even though the content of what people are saying is so serious, there is something in that inflation of the body which is comedic.

KW: But there is also other, not only comical aspects of enlargement. There is an ethical aspect. If there is this other person who is less fortunate and less exposed, less visible than myself—that person seems to be smaller than me. Even horizontal, like a discarded object, but definitely smaller. So the ethical technique here would be to enlarge that person, turn her into my teacher, somebody from whom I can learn about the world. Benjamin would like that idea of seeing history from the point of view of the vanquished. Levinas would like it, seeing the other as larger than myself. I don't know how Bakhtin would see it, but perhaps there would be some links there to him, if we were to analyze the ethics of Bakhtin's theory of carnival. It's not necessarily comical, but it is humble. Rather than thinking that one inflates the weak, to create a new hero, (like in the socialist-realist magnifications of "the proletarian"), one can also see it as an ethico-esthetic act of reducing ourselves (as "bigger" more fortunate, visible and powerful persons) — to the humble, smaller scale when facing and standing in face, looking up to the face of the weaker. As we were yet to grow

up to understanding of their level of experience, critical perception and perspective.

GN: What about with the prosthetics? Do you think there is an inherent comic value at all for the person using it?

KW: Yes, it is comical by principle, because of the relation between human and machines and all humanoids. When it comes to cyborgs, it's not necessarily comical, it's more of the recognition of the artificiality of ourselves. Since we are cyborgs, whether we like it or not, especially on occasions when we have to learn things that seem to be artificial to us. So immigrants, for example, are cyborgs, between the lost land and promisedland, between the mother tongue and a new language. They are between cultures, and have to navigate. And that ability to navigate between the foreign, strange, and seemingly artificial and the natural that becomes also strange, and more and more artificial the longer you are in a new context—the continuing shift—turns a person into...someone who is in charge of his or her own body, of the artificial and natural aspects of mind and body. So equipment may be needed—equipment is always needed in those situations of crossings and of boundaries.

GN: We have one author in this issue writing about Mona Hatoum's *Corps étranger*. You must be familiar with Hatoum's work? It seems to address similar themes as much of your own work, issues of immigration, alienation....

KW:.. There are plenty of people, especially people who are not like myself and Mona Hatoum "artistic artists" but who are "life-artists", artist themselves, artists in crossing borders, who then discover that transitory condition and consciousness of self, and of own culture, new culture and old culture. These are the artists of survival in crossing a multitude of internal and external borders. This kind of philosophers, prophets, like the Wandering Jew. Someone who is carrying some knowledge, and at the same time is in a continuing process of becoming a new person as new borders are being crossed, or internal borders are being crossed that one carries inside of oneself. This is a work of art already, to live this way. It's the work of a storyteller. It's the work of a magician and wandering artist—artist in survival, whether you actually are officially an artist, making money, or just helping yourself to be seen and accepted as an entertainer. Or you are disguised, a kind of survivor-magician/storyteller/comedian, or what Kristeva calls a "Baroque" personality: immigrants—strangers—who have to have excessive gestures and accents, and some entertainment value to be admitted by others. Or have to be always playing back to expectations of being some kind of person, as a stranger, so there's a humor and consciousness of a culture that expects you to be this stranger—this "proper stranger."

This is an incredible thing going on. That's why I think strangers are both prophets and artists, and philosophers—existential philosophers, definitely. And also politicians or lawyers,

they are trauma specialists. So it does help—if that person is an artist—then of course it helps to inform this kind of art. Mona Hatoum is one important reference here. But one might list many. Gomez-Pena, for example, is an expert on this particular complexity, on being the stranger and the fool, the jester. Gomez-Pena is probably one of the most known performers who performs this kind of multiplicity of identities in the process of becoming. Then there are other people who cross borders: Abramovic, and those other performers and body artists.

GN: What were you doing in Israel this past month? I couldn't find much information on this work?

KW: It's not happening much. We have some delays and not much may happen because war is on. The issue is an extreme case of a wall, because there's already some kind of wall built by some Israelis, especially, who simply want to shield themselves from the reality of, well, life, and Palestine, the fact that this is Israel itself that now creates a ghetto because it reminds them of the horrors of the original ghetto, the nightmare of their past. There are all sorts of (mental, cultural and political) walls that are being built there. Now to create some communication across those walls requires quite a radical project. I found many problems, but the one that was very clear to me was the situation in Tel Aviv. It looks like an entire city lives in some unreality, or doesn't want to deal with realities, and maybe it was built—it looks like it was built—for that purpose. Because the city looks like a Bauhaus-beach. The city doesn't want to know much of Jerusalem, of the past, and doesn't want to deal with so-called "Arabs." Those who are sending suicide bombers, according to their terrorist strategy, see Tel Aviv as the most legitimate target. They want to disrupt that life, that fairy tale.

So I try to imagine various artistic projects that will wake up the city instead of suicide bombers, explosions. One of those projects could be a projection that's interactive, to really allow people from the other side of the wall to speak to Tel Aviv, and also to let Tel Aviv to respond. But there is no symmetry here, so the project must be asymmetrical, as those from the other side of the wall—again, coming back to our previous conversation—should be larger, bigger, and initiate communication themselves. Much social and psychological work needs to be done so those people will learn how they can make good use of this kind of project for their lives, how they can really find words and expressions and actually learn how to initiate dialogue without offending and intimidating the fearful citizens of Tel Aviv, but rather opening up in such way so it wouldn't be sloganistic and politically predictable. Perhaps the Israel side can respond in some way, but the Palestinian side has to be more powerful, in order to counterbalance the actual configuration of forces. So that is a very complicated project, and probably cannot be accepted very easily by authorities.

GN: Were you invited to do the piece?

KW: I was invited to propose a project.

GN: Thinking about the architecture of a wall, and how architecture, walls, monuments, become sites for your own work, I wonder if you think that public space can actually be designed in such a way that it encourages democracy, or is it something that almost necessarily must be intervened in by an outsider? Does democracy necessarily involve an act of subverting existing spaces, or can spaces be intentionally conducive to it?

KW: Let's hope that they can. One thing I'd like to say is that when we speak about architecture or we speak about my projects that are in some ways animating the architecture, we emphasize too much exactly that—that is, this *thing*, (the architecture, the event, the spectacle, an urban animation), and what does it do in itself, how are we, "the public" are "responding to it"—without taking into account all of the process that leads to that moment of a thing built or functioning, or the thing being made as a kind of communicative spectacle. So before we can elaborate on your question, we have to question the completeness and self-sufficiency of a thing in itself. In other words, to not expect that the thing in itself is going to do something, such as a building, that it's going to do something, or that the projection is going to do something. Or the building of an instrument.

At least I can speak for my own practice, in that the animation of a monument may take a year of work, and this is just not to design a spectacle, but to create a situation in which people can develop certain trusts and become artists themselves in conveying, or in speaking of what's unspeakable. So it's not that this thing that I do does it—it's also my presence there and the presence of some organizations, and psychotherapists or social workers or festival organizers or curators. There's also the involvement of families of those people, the complicated negotiations going on, all of which is part of the work. So I cannot deny that the work inspires this process, but it's not a thing that does it. So the agency has to become a kind of—what I have mentioned before on occasion—a good enough mother, someone who protects the process. And I think it's part of the work. It's not something that is just a preparation or design process, no. And when it comes to instruments and equipment it's the same: You need a thing and you need those who will be able to take a risk and make a leap in trying to make use of them, first—the agents.

So you can say, do we need an avant-garde architect? Well, perhaps. We need avant-garde *users*. You need social networks. You need to design processes, not just the *thing*. So rather than barricading the space with forms that express "displacement" and "movement" and "openness" while in fact often disrupting the possibility of movement and change—they are substitutes, replacements for actual changes in society and in human minds and lives)—the architect could create certain conditions or instruments, points, elements, that can inspire people to make good use of them toward a change in their lives. Not working alone, but gathering other important agents that help others to turn their lives into something better,



or become co-agents, agents that generate co-agents. This is also design, and this is also architecture if we want to use this word, to expand and enlarge its sense.

And perhaps modern architecture in the Bauhaus time, they had some sense of this. Now we of course see how naive it was, also their expectation that *form* would do everything. But the formal projects were also submerged in some—at least in the case of the Bauhaus—social democratic networking expectations, enlarging and creating new options. Yes, it was naive. So what is it that we should do instead to be not so naive but still have some larger horizon, as our modern ancestors did? I don't know. I have no answer to this, except that...focusing on forms that are stable, permanent structures, that are monuments to architects' creative zeal and formal talents, that's not the direction, that's for sure. I don't think there's something wrong with having those talents and zeals, but we have to start seeing. What are those processes, what is hidden? We have to also respond to needs that are supposedly *wrong* needs, needs that should not exist. That's what I call interrogative design, seeing design as a process of uncovering needs and responding to them in hope that by the process of responding to them, and articulating them in public, we may contribute to conditions (of the social consciousness) that will render those needs obsolete. So rather than cover up the world with facades of solutions, design could also enter very difficult areas.

I am very glad to see that there is a very large number of artists now—designers/artists or artists/designers—who are responding to those inconvenient needs and exposing the world, interrogating the world. And you go to the exhibition called "Interventionists" at Mass MoCA. I think this is the show, this type of exhibition, which should be visited by most young architects, so they will see how much design by people who are trained as designers, or not necessarily trained as designers, but somehow where the intervention, disruption—you can call it inversion—is a design practice and at the same time an artistic project. And to what degree it puts the designer in the position of an agent, not only as interrupter but as someone who can be used by others. And the project can be used to help people to either put their forces together towards some change, or break communication walls, or recognize their own needs, or I don't know...Simply, the design process can become a great cognitive process through which they are learning what they actually would like.

I vaguely remember one architect—maybe I made up too many expectations out of my early contact with his work, so maybe if I saw it again I'd change my mind. But, his name was Lucien Kroll. He was one of the first architects who used computers, not only as a tool to help his own design, formal kind of tendencies, or technical, to make shorter some process of realization or whatever simulation needs the computer can meet, but to work with users in discussing what kind of space they would like to live in. So the simulation was used as a process of negotiating with and among the users their own desires and

their own perplexed and antagonistic ideas of living. So this was interesting. We see it in co-housing movements here and there, lots of discussions of this sort. But I think it is a method, seeing a design in that part already as the role of the designer. It's interesting to me.

GN: I always think of Christo and how he engages the very networks that are attempting to stop his work from happening. But I think many avant-garde architects see community approval-boards and even the client as being an opposition that they have to ignore or defeat without actually trying to engage these people in a more meaningful discussion.

KW: But the designer is learning about his own shortage of imagination, and they [the client] is also learning about their shortage of imagination. So the computer and the simulation technology becomes a thing in-between that has a developmental quality for both. And the designer's role is to protect this process, rather than be afraid of it. And embrace it! And the user's role is to be more open to the fact that they are really in a learning process about who they are. You know, the design process is always incredible. But when it comes to designing something for a particular group of people, for a family, then the design is becoming a vehicle or medium through which all the arguments develop. So the role of a design is not to make a building so much but maybe to help people to figure out that they should divorce, right? At the moment when the building is finished, the family falls apart, right? (Laughs) Because through this building they realize that their way of thinking is incompatible. So in that sense I think it's a very successful design, if it can reach...

Because the issue is not architecture, but life. I don't understand why so many architects think that architecture is more important than life, than human life.

GN: I think there is frustration for many young students and practitioners, not understanding how to translate humanistic ideals through a discipline that so intrinsically deals with private space, private property...

KW: I have the same amount of doubts about artists. I think that for many artists, most artists, art is more important than life, especially the life of other people, and they don't think to be interested, to be useful in any way. They have this idea that the inside of themselves is an entire world already, so once they work through their own inner world, the whole world will be saved. This seems to be also the case with many architects, so both should be questioned. Now, what you were saying about these kinds of ideals and then the realities of the profession, it's true. So why should we wait for commissions? For example, why should an industrial designer wait for a commission to do a project for mass production, when an industrial designer could create something in smaller numbers as a kind of temporary intervention that may be very important? An artist doesn't have

to have a gallery show. So perhaps there are various practices that architects could imagine that are not working in big corporate offices, or establishing their own big corporate office. I don't know, I'm not an architect, and there is a difference, of course, because artists are traditionally not expected to make a skyscraper or a big urban project, but they do expect to be successful. I'm not here to suggest what anybody should do, but I'm just surprised how limited the range of options are that people have in those areas, both art and design. There has to be some optimism attached to other scales of practices, and other scales of reception. Sometimes doing something for less people and of a smaller scale might be a very important agency, and can help, especially in understanding that we are not working alone, that each work makes sense in the context of other projects done by other people.

In other words, in the history of architecture—however you define it—an important part of it is the history of avant-garde architecture. Avant-garde architecture seems to be a contradictory concept, because it's an intervention, a disruption, a reprimand, visionary, utopian, yet it has to function, right?

GN: Do you think the implied duration of architecture—its definition as something more or less permanent—makes it for hard for it to create disruption?

KW: But we have lots of cases of interesting works in this area, and also we see shortcuts made by many of these artists and designers. The idea is not to abandon that tradition, but to see it in a different perspective. We are reading those histories, we are passing exams, but somehow we don't really see that's our obligation to carry on. That's what surprises me. I mean, not to carry on the mistakes and shortcuts, but to carry on some larger ethical and artistic obligation to look at our own, in this area, what seems to be a void—something we don't understand about ourselves. This is the area which needs to be looked at: Who are we? Why are we actually building those things? Who is this person or those people who are going to make sense of it? In what ways? Those questions are unanswered, and we should focus on them, as artists or designers. That's what our ancestors did in the avant-garde tradition, in however questionable a way. It's very easy to simply dismiss them, and say, "no" So if we dismiss them totally, then we have basically nothing to continue to hold on to, and we just simply accept our kind of instrumental role in the existing system.

GN: One commonplace contention, as voiced by Frederic Jameson, among others, is the claim that all forms of protest get absorbed into the capitalist system, thereby rendering them innocuous...

KW: Well, we have this problem with countercultural movements, with festivals. Carnivals have maybe been replaced by festivals, in our bourgeois culture. A festival is supposed to be, according to critics, a safety valve. So whatever we cannot

do all year long, now under controllable conditions authorities allow us to do once a year. That may be true, I don't question that. But at the same time, it's a moment that can be useful. So there are festivals, there are all sorts of versions of this festival. During the year, there could be competitions, there could be exhibitions, there could be publications, there could be conferences, experimental projects, there are some research projects. They're all safety valves, you could say, if you wanted to be very skeptical. But why not take advantage of it? Yes, it may be a safety valve but at the same time, it's a possibility of some kind of explosive practice that can disseminate some ideas beyond the imagination of those who supposedly control it. I doubt whether it's true, that there are people who control this. But even if we were to be so dark about it, we should appropriate all of those occasions. Because I've realized through my own work—this is not just theorizing—most of my projects are developed in the context of festivals and because of the existence of festivals. They were on the verge of being cancelled, many of my projects, but they were developed far enough because of the festival, and it was hard to cancel them. And you could not control, of course, responses and feedback, and all the processes that led to the actual spectacle. They could not be reversed even if this spectacle was cancelled.

So there are lots of things that are positive uses of the work that received a green light because of the festival, and also because I didn't tell the organizers what's going to happen exactly. Or they didn't necessarily insist on knowing everything, either. It's a situation that public artists can use very well, and there's a kind of agonistic aspect of festivals which still exists despite all the worries of officials and all of the censorship that might be waiting there to act, because there's still that Greek tradition there. Maybe it's not the carnivalesque tradition, but it's the Dionysian festival tradition, it's the *agone*, a contest of poetry, athletic contests. There's a certain dynamics of festivals that are supposed to be inclusive, to include various strata, much more than in Greece, because now all people (not only an elite of members of ancient Polis) are supposed to have rights now: legal and even to some degree illegal immigrants, women, children, employed and unemployed laborers, elderly, "the handicapped" the so-called ethnic groups, and so many "other others," you know. Suddenly there is even some money here and there, and maybe it's a legitimization process for authorities. So they show once a year how open they are and how inclusive they are? Fine. That's what we have, let's use it. And go *beyond* the expectations and imagination of organizers, of the media, the public and all of these who may make use of such festivals and spectacles to make their own lives and the lives of others better. That's most important.

Travis Hanks

## Inside-Out: The Objectification of Embodiment



1 \_ Plate 28 in *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* of Vesalius, 1543.

"Outside architecture is always inside bodies, sexualities, history, culture, nature - all those others it seeks to exclude but which are the constitutive edges, the boundaries, of its operations."<sup>1</sup>

In the highly revered *theatrum anatomicum* that Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) performed at the peak of his career, the insides of the cadaver were quite literally turned out before an anticipatory audience, a scene captured resolutely in the woodcut which stands, replete with all the nuanced symbolism of Vesalius's own polemic, as the frontispiece of the *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. These inverted figures, standing on the cusp of two worlds where object and subject are mirrored, present definitively the idea of an unmoved observer, and offer a forward glimpse of the Enlightenment dichotomy of perspective and objective truth. The attempt to unravel this truth was played out in anatomy as in architecture through projection and representation, or as the re-appropriation of (body) mass to flat surface.

In 1994 the National Library of Medicine posted on the internet the first images of the 'Visible Human Project,' a three-dimensional, virtual recreation of a human cadaver. This 'dataset,' a remarkably comprehensive re-animation of a 'real' human (with a name, a history - a life and a death) was comprised of a visual archive of exterior, interior, and sectional views frozen in 'real time.' This "spectacularly gruesome iconography," as evidenced from the strong fascination surrounding its release, stands as more than simply another step in medical or technological progress.<sup>2</sup> What is compelling about the appearance of the 'Visible Human' is the dissolution of translation in the 'experience' of representation, or the idea of objectified interaction. This visual hybrid, like the critical work of Vesalius, forges a new path through the dialectic of sensory experience and conceptual constructs. What might this new renaissance of visualization and representation reveal about how the digital continues to change the way we experience our bodies, and by extension, architecture? Furthermore, what might one renaissance tell us about the other and the potential impact of its altered perception on fields of design?



**Microcosm to Microscope**

With the 1543 publication of *De Humanı Corporis Fabrica*, Andreas Vesalius launched the age of modern observational science. The accuracy and comprehensiveness of the corresponding woodcuts, thought to be a collaboration between the Paduan Vesalius and the studio of the acclaimed Venetian painter Titian,<sup>3</sup> are due in part to his unabashedly personal and relatively frequent dissections of human rather than animal cadavers. Yet unlike his contemporary Copernicus,<sup>4</sup> Vesalius seemed able to assume another sort of 'privileged stance' (other than his familial connections with Emperor Charles V) that allowed his own vision of cosmos inversion to go unnoticed by the condemning scrutiny of the Church. The world view that had been taken from the ancients and perpetuated throughout the middle ages in mystical scholasticism, held that the body was the divine key to a divine cosmos, every node and organ of the interior of the human 'fabric' corresponding directly (though analogically) to an exterior cosmological force. This philosophical view of the body as microcosm, which dominated Western anthropology and cosmology until the Enlightenment, viewed the problem of human existence as "drama played out on a cosmic stage."<sup>5</sup> While the drawings of Vesalius have for the most part been purged of the astrological/diagrammatic backgrounds of medieval representations of the body, they nevertheless retain the trace of this overarching drama in their compositions. Indeed, even as the figures, through the systematic removal of layers, approach the very limits of cohesion as a body, they are imbued with an irrational vitality that animates them down to every part.

In his essay, "The Architectonics of Embodiment" (2002), Dali-bor Vesely traces this idea of animation a step further, pointing out a connection between this part-to-whole relationship of body and 'soul' and the animation of reality itself. Vesely points out that in a 'primary tradition' taken from Plato and Aristotle, the same force which animates the body, that moves it from within and not by external action, is linked by harmony and proportion to that force which similarly animates the universe.<sup>6</sup> However, it is not easily determinable whether this force which moves from within, the central anima or soul, the mediation between corpo-real and ether-real, is still present in the figures of Vesalius. In spite of all its 'drama' and vitality, the subjectivity of the Vesalian figure is undermined by the focus of the examination which is its purpose. For the anatomist, the necessary (psycho-emotive) separation of the self from the corpse laid out before them, in order to discern 'scientifically' (what Foucault would term the exercise and decisions of the gaze), is coupled with an awareness of the evacuated nature of that corpse. This 'objective' dis-tance which dissection implies can be seen as a critical fissure in the way the subject is understood as existing in the world. As Vesely argues, when the invisible principals which are intelligible through a conception of the mind are given over to the sense, or that which is

immediately perceivable, the presence of the 'soul' becomes undetectable. That is to say, when we arm sight with the ability to grasp reality in the same way as the intellect, we collapse the relation of the body to that which moves it, and reduce a harmony and proportion of dimension and distance to mere number

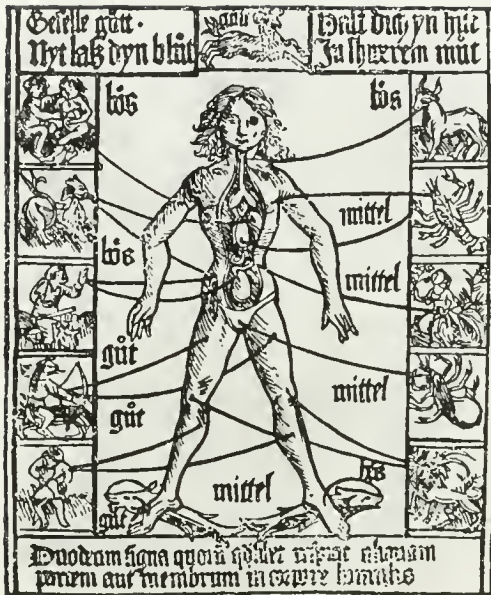
The *écorché* of the *Fabrica*, showing skin, muscle and sinew peeling away one strata at a time would become the *modus operendi* of anatomical illustration for centuries to come.<sup>7</sup> This shift in representation, the 'unveiling' of the body's inner mystery, sparked more than a revolution in anatomical pedagogy. The turn towards a more objective view of the body would be the



2\_The Visible Human Male.



3\_Visible Male bone surfaces



4\_1480 woodcut showing correlation between anatomical and astronomical 'structures'



5\_Visible Human Male Head with rendered interior structures.

impetus for a new 'observational' medicine of diagnosis from 'pure signs.' Now, instead of each part of a corporal interior corresponding symbolically with external (cosmological) forces within its world, outer 'symptoms' could be read as signifiers of internal functions or mal-functions. The pre-Enlightenment microcosmic view of the body, which was interwoven with a harmonic and proportioned view of the macrocosm, continued to be undermined by an objectification of the body into signs and signifiers that existed in the world and yet were somehow not a part of it—were set apart. This emerging indexical view of the body, which became codified in the 17th and 18th centuries through an increasingly pathological medical practice and definitive publications such as Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, would change not only the perspective of the physician toward the subject, but subjectivity itself.

### Trans-Corporeal Mass

Just as *theatrum anatomicum* literally turned human cadavers inside out, the Vesalian figures, by presenting inner machinations of the viscera, invert the idea of animated body and embodiment. The systematic archeology of the Vesalian prints reveal body mass as successive layerings of parametric surfaces, each removal of tissue revealing another until there is nothing left. And while this 'facialized' view of interiority failed in one way to reveal in manifest physicality the popular and long held perception of the body as a vessel or carrier of the animating soul, it left something else in its wake—namely, the spatialization of presence, a space without dimension. This idea of a space that is there and yet not there maintains a particular fecundity in light of contemporary 'digital' design discourse.

Unlike Vesalius's translation of mass to a language of the surface, the Visible Human Project of the 1990's (henceforth VHP) created a photorealistic model, a surrogate body which was made visible as virtual endoscopy by an animating interface. Instead of a re-organizing of the human body into a sequential laminar spacialization compatible with the stacked pages of the book, the 'digital' has made the opacity of the body infinitely transparent and immediate. Is this collapse of distance, of dimension, and of hierarchy into an elastic simultaneity within the flatness of the quasi-dioramic virtual screen-space not unlike that collapse in Vesely's discussion of sense and intellect? The current fascination with surface, which finds its origin in our modern propensity to develop and manipulate the photographic image, may allow us to view this collapse as a parallel to the social amalgamation of simulacra and the 'hypereal'. Increasingly our world view understands not only the transfer of information, but the physical relation of our bodies to architecture as (technological) interface.



If the idea of translation as a "uniform space through which meaning may glide without modulation" is itself a delusion or an "enabling fiction" as Robin Evans suggests,<sup>8</sup> then what happens if the dissolution of this space is itself a delusion? Through 'digital' representation the spectacle of the *theatrum anatomicum* is re-appropriated from a topographical space to a tomographical space of transforming sections and artificially animated 'fly-throughs.' Yet, while this body acquires new spatial accessibility, its interiority somehow containing four-dimensional space, it still retains its laminar root through the spectacular image and the ontology of interface. Is the 'digital' then, by its very conception and dissemination within a transparent space, destined to always be a displaced interactive surface? Should we not distrust the purity of vision as much as we question the validity of concepts? The apparent paradox of three- and four-dimensional space 'experienced' through a one- or two-dimensional plane may be both the long-awaited agent of freedom from the surface of the page, and simply the next version of 'this will kill that'. It is after all up to us to demand more of 'digital' representations by examining their predispositions toward an assimilation of mass into surface, and the nature of that vision which is both sensory and intelligent.

#### Coda: Fabrica

It is important in this discussion to note the significance of the word *Fabrica*, the Latin root of fabric, whose evocation of woven material resonates explicitly in the tightly knitted surface structures of Vesalius's well known flayed men. *Fabrica* is also linked to fabrication from an alternate definition of the Latin root as workshop, from *faber*, worker, as well as from its doublet, forge. Connoting an idea of *homo faber*, or man as artisan, Vesalius reveals the Humanist fascination with the man-made. In the *Fabrica*, appropriately, Vesalius demonstrates a kind of putting together through a taking apart. In the re-forming of the human body into states that had never existed and could never exist as an (animated) human form, Vesalius fabricates a story, forges a fiction, which could be interpreted as the antithesis of Classical proportion.

Insofar as Vesalius was attempting to re-construct the body in the surface of the page, it could be said he was 'writing the body' (of the book) in the same demiurgic act of building the book (of the body).<sup>9</sup> This may account in part for the almost paternal attention that Vesalius gave to craft in the production of the *Fabrica*, within whose stacked pages an existence was bound. Vesalius, the son of a physician and an ambitious young professor had gone to great lengths to produce plates "which are not to be printed like ordinary textbooks," but rather "made with so much labor for the general use of students."<sup>10</sup> Vesalius, who admonished his predecessors for teaching from afar, no longer exercised a passive gaze, one without gesture, but a gaze which attempted to set the body in motion. The

objectified body is once again made subject to a world, not through its own sense or intellect, but through the intelligible sense, the animating gaze of the 'other'.

In the case of the VHP, the fabrication of an anatomical example exists not as a compilation of a varied population, but as the virtual continuation of a 'real' life, a reincarnation of an individual existence. The transparency of body mass, made readily available and traversable thru (CT) scanning and (MRI) technology, makes it increasingly subject to the intrusion of the formative gaze. The observational stance of the anatomist is expressed as a continuation of sovereign power over the individual. This individual, which is made subject from without and not from within, has more to do with marginalization and isolation (of 'woman' and of 'criminal' for example) than with the belonging of a body located (by itself) within a world. Might these same observations not hold true for the representations of the architect? In 'digital' design and fabrication, as in the *Fabrica* of Vesalius, the representation of the thing is no longer removed, but becomes the thing itself: the drawing is the model is the medium of fabrication. And yet, as in the case of the VHP, the reduction into such a weighted singularity begs the question: why this body...just so...now?

When the distance of representation is collapsed, so too is the space of interpretation. In anatomical representations the focusing of attention on certain constructs while eliminating others seeks to educate students in the language of the body. If indeed there is a similar idea of a language in architecture, what can we say about the writing of and the participation in this language? What fiction do we propagate about the architectural body, and what spectre do we engender through the looking glass: the immaterial embodiment of an animated death, a memory of itself? As the framework for a 'language of design' is increasingly turned over to the machine, what position does the designer occupy? On one hand, accessibility to such 'machine language(s)' is limited to sense in as much as it can be communicated through the screen; yet on the other, the high formalism and codification of (programming) language threatens to turn perception over to a quantifying intellect.

Any understanding of an embodied experience of space depends equally on how we view our bodies (as the vehicle for experience and not simply an elaborate metaphor), and how we view the architecture (as both the framing and the embodiment of space). Likewise, if we are to embark on a serious investigation of where the 'digital' may take us, it is imperative that we entertain a critical discussion of where this vision comes from, what are its roots, and what frames it, but also to attempt to examine it from outside its own armatures. The *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, while certainly standing out as a magnificent example of (an art and) a science ahead of its time, was also indicative of an emerging cultural milieu. The mind-body split which began to reveal itself in the mid-16th century



would become the driving force in the Cartesian philosophy of the next century and ultimately the core of Western consciousness. Ironically, this shift which would redefine how the thinking subject would inhabit the world (and architecture), can be said to have originated not from a field that dealt directly with those changing frameworks, but rather one that examined the body itself, whose physical substance had not changed. This irony, when overlaid with the pause in critical dialogue concerning the 'digital', might still teach architects and theorists something about the relevance of what remains 'outside' of architectural discourse. Moreover, how might this paradox inform and/or challenge contemporary phenomenological and hermeneutic arguments which propose a rereading of the common corporeality of the human body and of the world? Is it even possible to arrive at an shared understanding of embodiment that is still meaningful from a modern viewpoint? These and other questions remain bound up in seeing and reasoning, as we as architects and we as perceiving bodies continue to trace the merging of horizons which mediate the (inside) self with the (outside) world.

#### Notes:

1. Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture From the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), xvii
2. Catherine Waldby, *The Visible Human Project. Informatic Bodies and Posthuman Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4
3. The question concerning authorship of the woodcuts prepared for the *Fabrica* remains largely unanswered. It is generally agreed that multiple artists contributed to the large number of plates, including Vesalius himself and Jan Stefan van Kalker, a student of Tiziano Vecellio (Titian). For more, see: J.B. Saunders and Charles O'Malley, *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* (New York: World Publishing, 1950).
4. The *De revolutionibus* of Copernicus was published in 1543, the same year as *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. While I cannot entertain in this essay an extensive investigation of the relations between the two, it is important to note the difference between the concept constructed in the mind of Copernicus and the tangibility of concept at the hand of Vesalius.
5. Dalibor Vesely, "The Architectonics of Embodiment," found in Tavenor and Dodds, ed., *Body and Building: Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 31
6. Ibid., 32-34
7. For more, see K.B. Roberts and J.D.W. Tomlinson, *The Fabric of the Body: European Traditions of Anatomical Illustration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
8. Robin Evans, "Translations from Drawing to Building", in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association Publications, 1997), 154
9. For more see Indra Kagis McEwen, *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003)
10. From a letter written by Vesalius to the printer, Johannes Oporinus. Found in Saunders and O'Malley, *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* (New York: World Publishing, 1950).

Chris Muskopf

## Constructing Demolition: A New Design for Detroit



Architecture is presumed to be an act of creation, but more and more, it is incumbent upon the profession to recognize that it as an act of destruction. While there is much talk among professionals of adaptive re-use, rehabilitation, preservation, etcetera, there is surprisingly little discourse that recognizes destruction itself as a potential—and increasingly necessary—mode of design. The following project looks at large defunct factory complexes as a starting point for reversing the design process from ground-up to “ground-down.”

Operating between the wrecking ball and the museum, the project proposes a very careful kind of demolition. It takes cues from the more precise Latin root of *rasus* (as in, to raze a building to the ground) indicating an activity of shaving or scraping as opposed to imploding or smashing. As a way of unbuilding, it is employed as an ultimately productive process in the life of a site. Tactical cuts may reveal and foster new connections, especially

in a building whose immense size makes it a barrier. Selectively removing certain components of the building could illuminate the construction process or change understandings of the site. Given particular site conditions, portions of buildings might be saved if their future use can be justified within the overall transformation of the site. Where the building (or portion of the building) cannot be saved, razing would permit the information to be recorded as matter is erased.

Generally speaking these situations these situations usually receive a merciless implosion or an overly lavish preservation. More than likely demolition usually wins producing one last mass-spectacle that comes at the cost of historical knowledge and cooperation for the larger social context. In those rarer cases where preservation wins, a blind sentimental respect has the potential to ossify the site in a more unfruitful form than in its abandoned or destroyed state. In light of these circumstances, what if preservation could be most effectively accomplished through some liberating aspect of the demolition process which saves the future from the past.

### Demolishing Detroit

The destruction of a significant building in the life of a city is more than the clearing of ground for the next project. It also represents a changing mentality and the passage of old order and the revelation of a new situation. Detroit's former mayor, Dennis Archer, presided over the city during the 90's and instituted a sweeping program of demolition. His attitude toward demolition as the first step in renewal became a normal one among a populace that was tired of living amidst ruins, no matter how many out-of-towners thought of those ruins as wonderful or sublime. At the implosion of one of the city's most important buildings, Hudson's Department Store, he is quoted by an aide as saying “He's excited. It's not the end of something, it's the beginning of something new.”

That demolition can come to be thought of as a potentially positive concept, one needs only to look as far as Detroit's women's professional football team, the Detroit Demolition. The use of such a nickname has in Detroit, become a symbol for a new beginnings

inseparable from destruction and violence. But this is nothing new for the city. In a strange foreshadowing of its contemporary situation, the city motto *Sperimus Meliora, Resurget Cineribus* means "rising from the ashes, we hope for better things." This was not adopted after the riots of the 60's or even the 40's but in 1807 long before Detroit had any pretensions of regional or national importance (or any high position from which to fall). This pairing of hope and the wreckage seems to persist through the collective mentality of the city. Instead of demolition simply adopting a symbolic meaning, the symbol has adopted demolition itself as an integral power to the functioning of the city.

The idea that the city functions not in spite of demolition but through demolition is apparent in the case of the demolition of the city hall in the early 80's. Detroit, as one of the most relentlessly centered cities in the US relies on a concentric means of orienting. Streets and points are measured from the radius from city hall, which marked the geographic epicenter of the city and its suburbs. To erase the physical and symbolic centerpoint of this vast urban system must have signified more than a simple land clearance program. Demolition as a symbolic act can stand for remembering the past, but it may function more frequently as a means of forgetting.

The McGraw Glass Plant in Western Detroit was closed at the end of 2003. This plot of land was occupied by glaciers, various inland lakes, agricultural fields, a brickyard and claypit, a LaSalle motors factory and now by an amalgam of windowless additions to the factory. Albert Kahn designed part of the existing building in 1936 as a press shop for the Chrysler-DeSoto division. World War II brought about its emergency conversion for the production of machine guns and parts for B-26 bombers. Chrysler discontinued the DeSoto line and the plant was then converted to the manufacture of glass products in the 60's, but a five-day worker strike there in 1994 nearly shut down all of Chrysler's operations and forced the company to make expensive upgrades to the facilities. The ensuing 110-million dollar investment could not prevent the closure of a plant with too much human and machinic capital operating in accordance with an outdated Fordist model of industry. In the

following project, I explore a few techniques for the creative destruction of the McGraw Glass Plant.

## Demolition As Spectacle

Demolition itself is constructed: Though it produces ruins only of temporary or momentary duration, the scene of the demolition can continue to exert influence long after the dust is settled. Sometimes the spectacle of demolition affords the only opportunity for a passerby to fully appreciate the object of destruction and the necessary violence. Within these highly visible, spectacular acts of unbuilding, two particular aspects of demolition that offer design potential. These might be termed the "Grand Opening" and the "Grand Closing." The Grand Opening (somewhat tongue in cheek) literally and physically opens the building. Whether one is able to see three floors of a house at once or the interior of Boston Garden because the wall has been ripped off, the transparency of demolition is responsible for such piqued interest. Rightly so, demolition forcibly pries and cuts open a previously closed situation in a decidedly anti-architectural way, if one simply defines architecture as the enclosure of space. This should force a revision of such a definition, as seeing a building literally cut-through in section is one of the most quintessentially architectural forms of vision.

On the other hand, nothing in the world of demolition is more definitive, deliberate and singular than the implosion of a large building. This could be called the Grand Closing, as it presents a pile of debris falling in on itself, collapsing space, and forever ending the use of the assembled elements in the building in quite the same way. No matter the original stratigraphy and hierarchy of the layers of a complex building, they all become equally unimportant as they plummet to the ground. Where they end up is as difficult to decipher as a complex geological disturbance, foundations lying on top of roofs, and floors disobeying the laws of superposition. Despite, or perhaps because of the impending mess, few events are able to singularly focus attention on the life (and death) of a building like an implosion or collapse.



1\_ Axonometric of Demolition Spectacle Fence



When the cloud appears, there can be no doubt that one era has ended, though the recognition that another has begun is usually obscured by the rising dust and immense noise of the sublime moment. Nonetheless, spectacular collapses and implosions are often seen as a clarion call of the new, especially those demolitions which are intended as both spectacles and symbols. Having observed demolition's function as a symbol as well as a spectacle, the project uses these deliberate ways of unbuilding as a generative means for addressing the future of the McGraw Glass plant. lockers are used for the display of artifacts descend again onto the shop floor. The room would serve as an impromptu museum where lockers are used for the display of artifacts.

This act proposes to cut away half the locker room cladding, allowing it to exist suspended between a static preservation and a thoughtless destruction. The removal of the cladding also makes the locker room into a privileged vantage point over the newly-opened urban cloister. In addition, the bays that constituted the gun plant could be hollowed-out as a part of the recycling plant operations.

## Enacting the Spectacle of Demolition

How popular would the combination factory tour and demolition be? Humans seem to be innately fascinated both with seeing things made (whether they are donuts or automobiles) and with seeing things destroyed (whether they are old cars or purported terrorist hideouts). This act proposes to satisfy both cravings through the open representation of the demolition process as it is used to enact new (productive) uses on the site, particularly those of trucking and recycling operations. The East façade exists as a barrier, can still be used as a buffer for work going on at east side of the site. It will gradually be cut away to reveal activities inside and will end up as a park canopy, charting the progress of the site from private to public. The idea of the spectacle is extended in other ways as well. The facade-turned-fence also serves as an elevated walkway in the a reconstituted factory tour of the recycling facility. Because the facade marked the limit of the factory, its life as an conveyance system for curious visitors will be perfectly suited for walking around the site



2\_ Perspective rendering of Demolition Spectacle Fence



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The platonic concept of a systemic connection between our individual being and the world as a whole has shaped the contours of mysticism, alchemy, philosophy, aesthetics and the arts throughout history. Even though in classical thought, a microcosm is primarily defined as a self-enclosed and monadic sphere, it is imagined to have a crucial relationship to the outside. This interaction has been described either as a homologous relationship between internal patterns and outside forces, or alternatively, as one in which a system follows its own logic independent of the outside.

The model of the microcosm has gained new relevance in the current modes of globalization. To counter the homogeneity implied by their global geo-economic operations, multinational corporations are more than willing to present microcosmic identities as possibilities of individualistic escape. What critical potential does the idea of the microcosm hold in this realm? Does the opposition between a global enclosure and microcosmic systems still offer a productive line of thinking, or is the global/local dialectic defunct? How have art and architectural practices participated in staging or undermining the idea of microcosm and its associated ideologies throughout history?

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